

Hafa Adai!

Sagana to appeal sentence to 9th Circuit. **PAGE 2**
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House calls for Gaza ceasefire

By **FERDIE DE LA TORRE**
ferdie_delatorre@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

» **Resolution described as historic as CNMI among first US territories to call for ceasefire**

The CNMI House of Representatives adopted yesterday a House resolution that calls for an immediate de-escalation and ceasefire in Israel and occupied Palestine.

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DPS probes knife-wielding burglar



KIMBERLY B. ESMORES

The Department of Public Safety continues to investigate a recent report they received about a knife-wielding burglar who nearly injured a man whose home he had burglarized.

By **KIMBERLY B. ESMORES**
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Safety continues to investigate a recent report they received about a knife-wielding burglar

See DPS on Page 4

IPI sues CCC anew

By **KIMBERLY B. ESMORES**
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Imperial Pacific International (CNMI) LLC has filed another civil suit against the Commonwealth Casino Commission in federal court, stating

that the CCC is taking a judicial role in interpreting the Casino License Agreement, essentially depriving the casino investor of its U.S and CNMI constitutional rights.

IPI, through attorneys

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FERDIE DE LA TORRE

Organizers and supporters of Marianas for Palestine pose for a photo in front of the legislative building on Capital Hill shortly after the House of Representatives adopted yesterday morning a House resolution to call for an immediate de-escalation and ceasefire in Israel and occupied Palestine.

Battle of Saipan veteran celebrates 100th birthday

» **Happy birthday, Lloyd Glick, on behalf of the people of Saipan and Guam**



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Lloyd Glick at 95, as grand marshal for the 75th Commemoration of the Battle of Guam.

By **WALT F.J. GOODRIDGE**
Special to the Saipan Tribune

devoid of heroics."—Lloyd C. Glick

"I don't think I have done anything that 400,000 other sailors didn't do. I was just one of many and am completely

That quote is from an email correspondence I had with

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JIM DAVIES

Lloyd Glick at 90, poses with his wife, Judy, and the author in 2014 on Saipan overlooking the lagoon.

INSIDE



BUSINESS

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WORLD

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SCAN ME WITH A COMPATIBLE QR READER TO KEEP UPDATED ON ALL THE LATEST NEWS.



GOT A NEWS TIP?

TEL: 235-6397 / 235-2440

FAX: 235-3740

EMAIL: editor@saipantribune.com

Local

Sagana to appeal sentence to 9th Circuit

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Bonifacio Sagana, through attorney Richard Miller, has notified the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit that he intends to appeal the sentence the U.S. District Court for the NMI had imposed on him.

Sagana, 58, also notified the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit that he also intends to appeal the court’s decision to deny his motion for a new trial.

“Pursuant to Rule 3 of the Federal Rules of Appellate Procedure, notice is hereby given that defendant Bonifacio Vitug Sagana, by and

through court-appointed counsel, appeals to the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit from the amended judgment which [was] issued on Dec. 20, along with all interlocutory orders and rulings prior to, during, and after trial...,” states the notice.

Sagana, who was unanimously found guilty of

conspiring with Bernadita Zata to illegally produce a CNMI driver’s license, was sentenced to 24 months in prison last week, following an over three-hour long sentencing hearing.

U.S. District Court for the NMI Chief Judge Ramona V. Manglona gave Sagana credit for time served. His

sentence will be followed by a term of three years of supervised release.

Sagana, who had fled to Wisconsin but was brought back to the CNMI to face federal charges, was allowed to remain under conditional release until he is placed in one of the Federal Bureau of Prisons’ facilities.

Sagana’s sentence includes 50 hours of community service.

According to court documents, the U.S. District Court for the NMI issued an arrest warrant for Sagana following

a grand jury indictment back on Jan. 31, on the charge of conspiring with others to unlawfully produce a CNMI driver’s license.

However, Sagana left the CNMI before he could be arrested and was only taken into custody last May 16 in Wisconsin.

Sagana was allegedly identified by other defendants facing the same charges as the person who arranged for them to fraudulently obtain a CNMI driver’s license using a counterfeit U.S. immigration visa number.

Attention CNMI Government Employees,
Retirees and Surviving Spouses

Open Enrollment
ends soon

Open enrollment runs Wednesday, November 29 - Thursday, December 28

Our goal is to provide you with access to the highest levels of care and support possible through our:

- Strong local presence, in partnership with Pacifica Insurance Underwriters, Inc.
- Comprehensive global resources and access to care
- 24/7 Member Service Support

Attention all members: Please review changes to plan benefits and premium deductions taking effect January 1, 2024. If you’re not making any changes to your enrolled plan, you do not need to submit an enrollment form.

Want to enroll, change your plan or update dependents: If you’re satisfied with your current plan and coverage, you DO NOT need to submit an enrollment form.

Deliver your form and any required documentation:

- Active employees: to your respective Agency or Department of Human Resources
- Retirees and surviving spouses: to Pacifica located in the Joeten Shopping Center, Insatto St., Susupe

Your health and safety are paramount.

- Visit our website listed below to view your Open Enrollment material and enrollment/change of status form to help you choose the best plan for you and your loved ones
- Open Enrollment support is available by phone and in-person

Websites to help you choose a plan:

- Aetna International: www.AetnaInternational.com/cnmi-ghli
- CNMI Dept of Finance: <https://finance.gov.mp/forms.php>

Have questions? Call us:

- For Open Enrollment inquiries, contact Pacifica locally at: **670-234-6267** Monday — Friday, 8 AM-5 PM
- For non-OE related inquiries, contact our Member Service Center 24/7 at: **800-231-7729**

Open enrollment runs from November 29 through December 28, 2023.

AetnaInternational.com

1377557-01-02 (11/23)



Finance announces open enrollment for GHLI

Active Employees	High	Low	Basic
Employee	\$ 106.57	\$ 57.44	\$ 33.24
Employee + 1 Dependent	\$ 218.47	\$ 117.76	\$ 68.15
Employee + Family	\$ 341.03	\$ 183.81	\$ 106.38
Retirees	High	Low	Basic
Employee	\$ 115.45	\$ 62.23	\$ 36.01
Employee + 1 Dependent	\$ 236.67	\$ 127.57	\$ 73.83
Employee + Family	\$ 369.45	\$ 199.13	\$ 115.24

The breakdown of insurance rates under the 2024 CNMI Government Group Health and Life Insurance Trust Fund policy.

The Department of Finance has announced that the open enrollment period for the CNMI Government Group Health and Life Insurance Trust Fund is currently open through Dec. 28, 2023 for coverage effective Jan. 1, 2024.

The premium rates, indicated below, reflect an increase from previous years’ rates and are specified for individual employees, employees with dependents, and coverage for employees and their families. Government employees are encouraged to review the different options that are available so that they can sign up or modify their insurance coverage during the open enrollment period.

“Our administration is committed to ensuring that CNMI residents have access to quality and affordable coverage,” said Gov. Arnold I. Palacios. “Nonetheless, given the fiscal challenges that we face and the cost containment measures we must implement to continue on the CNMI’s path to economic recovery, we must

re-evaluate the government’s share of employees’ and retirees’ premiums.”

Palacios stated that the Department of Finance team is already looking into options that reduce the government’s overall expenditure on healthcare and will be sharing these options and other updates soon.

Secretary of Finance Tracy Norita stated that the GHLI team is already contacting human resource departments at various agencies to provide information about the open enrollment period as well as changes that may be anticipated over the next few months. Employees and retirees can also contact the on island general agent, whose contact is listed below, for additional information.

Pacifica Insurance, general agent for Aetna Insurance located in Susupe at the Joeten Center, 1st floor, will be available to assist new and existing members. For more information please call (670) 234-6267. (PR)



DCCA postpones NAP benefit adjustment

The CNMI Department of Community and Cultural Affairs-Nutrition Assistance Program announced that it was postponing a benefit-level reduction that was earlier pub-

licized and would have been implemented on Jan. 1, 2024.

After further consultation with the U.S Department of Agriculture-Food and Nutrition Service on Dec. 20, 2023,

the NAP Office, together with the Office of the Governor and Office of Lieutenant Governor, has indicated that discussions about the benefit level adjustment are still ongoing,

and, as a result, the current benefit levels will be maintained through January 2024.

Representatives from the CNMI DCCA NAP will continue to work with USDA,

and additional information will be provided once a new memorandum of understanding is finalized between CNMI and USDA.

In anticipation of any change to benefits, the NAP Program continues to work with qualified applicants to

minimize any impact that a potential reduction may have. This includes meal budgeting and other activities.

Individuals with questions about the NAP Program or the benefit levels can contact the Nutrition Assistance Program Office at (670) 237-2800. **(PR)**



Tudela



Ada



Aninzo



Babauta



Cachero



Aldan-Castro



Escota



Esguerra



Gibson



Harrell

SHRM elects new officers

The CNMI Chapter of the Society of Human Resource Management announced yesterday that it has elected its board of directors for the year 2024.

"These individuals have been chosen to lead our chapter and continue the valuable work of advancing the HR profession in the Northern Mariana Islands," the group said in a news release.

They are:

■ Chapter president: Roman M. Tudela, Northern Marianas College

■ Past-president: Nicole S. Babauta, Docomo Pacific CNMI

■ President-elect: Joyce Esguerra, IT&E CNMI

■ Secretary: Rob Harrell, IT&E CNMI

■ Treasurer: Wendylyn Escota, Marianas Eye Institute

■ Membership & Market-

ing director: Christine Aninzo, CNMI Judiciary

■ Program director: Plumeria Aldan-Castro, Commonwealth Healthcare Corp.

■ Legislation director: Catherine Cachero (ex-officio member)

■ Certification director: Frank Gibson (ex-officio member)

■ Advisor to the board: Frank Ada, Triple J Enterprises (ex-officio member)

"Each member of the board

brings a wealth of experience, expertise, and dedication to the field of human resources, and we are confident that their leadership will contribute to the success and growth of our chapter," the SHRM news release stated.

"Our primary focus will be on fostering an even more inclusive and supportive environment for our members and advocating for the advancement of HR practices in our community by actively engaging with local businesses, educational institutions, and government bodies," said Tudela.

SHRM thanks its outgo-

ing board members for their efforts and commitment to the CNMI Chapter of SHRM during their tenure.

"We look forward to a productive and successful year ahead under the guidance of our new board of directors. The entire chapter is encouraged to support their initiatives, participate in chapter activities, and collaborate to further elevate the HR profession in our community," states SHRM. "We anticipate another year of excellence and achievement with the 2024 board of directors." **(PR)**

PROPERTY SALE NOTICE

of the remaining leasehold interests in a
Chalan Laulau view lot legally described:

**Lot EA 683, an area of 13,003 sq. meters,
55 yr lease was executed 5-15-22
ending 5-14-2077**

This sale is December 29, 2023 via zoom at 1pm CST.
Seller has the right to refuse any offer. Additional
information is available by emailing
saipanhomes@gmail.com Saipan Services Inc.,
for all CNMI property needs. 670-287-4766



NORTHERN MARIANAS HOUSING CORPORATION

P.O. BOX 500514, Saipan, MP 96950-0514
Email: nmhc@nmhc.gov.mp • Website: <http://www.nmhc.gov.net>
Tels: (670) 234-9447 / 234-6866 / 234-7670 • Fax: (670) 234-9021

PUBLIC DISCLOSURE

NMHC hereby publicly discloses that on Monday, January 31, 2022, Yvette R. and Ray D. Sablan, an immediate family member of Leilani A. Manibusan, an employee of NMHC, applied for assistance under the Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) Affordable Rental Housing Development Program.

Said applicant is aware of the housing needs of Low-to-Moderate Income (LMI) families who have been affected by Typhoon Mangkhut and Super Typhoon Yutu. The CNMI has not been able to recover from this disaster quickly enough to meet the community's housing needs. The "Westview Apartment" project proposes to build two (2) units, consisting of three-bedrooms each. The proposed project will contribute to addressing some of the market demands for affordable housing and the current housing shortages our island is experiencing. Leilani A. Manibusan is not and shall not be involved in the handling of this loan application.

NMHC discloses this possible conflict pursuant to 24 CFR § 92.356 in order to allow any interested persons to comment before the application is considered for an exception under the applicable conflict regulations.

Any comments should be submitted to NMHC on or before Friday, January 12, 2024.

Dated this 28th day of December, 2023.

/s/
Jesse S. Palacios
Corporate Director



COMMONWEALTH UTILITIES CORPORATION OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



INVITATION FOR BIDS CUC-IFB-24-002

AGINGAN WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT IMPROVEMENTS

The Office of the Executive Director, Commonwealth Utilities Corporation (CUC) is soliciting competitive sealed bids from qualified firms for the Construction of Agingan Wastewater Treatment Plant Improvements in Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

The work consists of furnishing all labor, supervision, equipment, materials and supplies for the construction of various improvements within the Agingan Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) for the project referred to as the AGINGAN WWTP IMPROVEMENTS, Saipan, CNMI under Project No. S18-065 and Project No. S20-079.

The work generally includes, but is not limited to:

Project No. S18-065

Installation of the owner-furnished primary screen within 120 calendar days after Notice to Proceed is issued. Additionally, replacement of the clarifier drive; rehabilitation of the headworks includes replacement of the weir gates to stop gate, a 1/2-ton hand crank hoist/crane; clarifier bypass; electrical service rehabilitation, replacement of the existing Motor Control Center (MCC), installation of a generator automatic transfer switch (ATS) and digester decanter improvements. The work shall be done in accordance with Project No. S18-065 Plans and Specifications.

Project No. S20-079

Provision of temporary facilities including bypass pumping; furnishing and installing new Vortex Grit Removal Equipment and headworks slide gates, which will require demolition of certain elements within and improvements to the existing headworks channel and deck area; replacement of the existing surface aerator equipment in the North/South Aeration Tanks and Aerobic Digester Tank with a new surface aerator equipment which will require modifications to the existing concrete tank structures; replacement of existing pipe supports for the Aeration Basin influent piping; associated electrical, instrumentation, and control improvements; demobilization; and all other work described in Project No. S20-079 Plans and Specifications.

The work shall be done without disruption to the daily operation of the wastewater system.

CUC requires the Project to be completed within 820 calendar days from the date of the award of contract.

The project is funded by a grant from the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). The award of this project is contingent upon receipt of approval for project award from USEPA.

Prospective Bidders for this IFB must pre-register with the CUC Procurement & Supply Division. The Bid Package may be obtained from the CUC Procurement and Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, Saipan, between 7:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, except on government observed holidays, upon completion of registration and presentation of a receipt evidencing a non-refundable payment to the CUC Treasury Section, by cash, check or credit card in the amount of \$200.00 (non-refundable) for one IFB package set.

A Pre-Bid Conference followed by a Site Visit is scheduled on **December 27, 2023 at 10:00 AM (ChST)** at the CUC Main Conference Room, 3rd Floor, Room No.17, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building.

One (1) original and Five (5) hard copies must be submitted in a sealed envelope marked "CUC-IFB-24-002, Agingan Wastewater Treatment Plant Improvements", to the CUC Procurement & Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, P.O. Box 501220, Saipan, MP 96950, **no later than 10:00 AM (ChST) on January 18, 2024**, at which time they will be publicly opened and read aloud. Late submissions and conditional bids will not be considered. Bid shall be submitted on the provided Bid Forms. Bidders are required to complete all Bid Forms. Bidders may supplement the form as appropriate. Bids will be required to be submitted under a condition of irrevocability for a period of 60 days after submission. **Late submissions and conditional bids will not be considered.**

All bidders are advised that CUC assumes no responsibility in any act of omission on the part of the bidders due to lack of information or understanding of the bid requirements in the course of Contractor's preparation of a bid under the contract.

A **Bid Guarantee** of not less than fifteen (15%) percent of the total bid price must accompany the bids. The bid guarantee may be in cash, certified check, cashier's check, or bid bond executed by a surety company holding a certificate of authority from the United States Secretary of Treasury as an acceptable surety. A Payment Bond of one hundred (100%) percent and a Performance Bond of one hundred (100%) percent of the total bid price will be required upon the execution of the contract by the successful bidder. The Payment and Performance bond must be executed by a surety company holding a certificate of authority from the United States Secretary of Treasury as an acceptable surety. Surety Company must be authorized to do business in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

All insurers' questions, concerns and qualification shall be handled by the Department of Commerce Office of the Insurance Commissioner (OIC). The OIC is tasked with regulating and monitoring compliance to the CNMI's Insurance Code (Title 4, Division 7). **Bidders are required to submit a clearance from the OIC certifying their insurer of choice is in compliance with the CNMI's Insurance Code.**

All bidders are required to comply with all CNMI and applicable Federal Laws. This bid and the ensuing contract shall be executed pursuant to the CUC Procurement Regulations.

All questions or request for clarification regarding this project must be submitted in writing no later than **10:00 (ChST) on December 28, 2023** to Mr. Manny B. Sablan, CUC Purchasing Administrator, via email at manny.sablan@cucgov.org with a copy to Mr. Larry Manacop, Acting Chief Engineer - via email at larry.manacop@cucgov.org, and Marcela Tenorio, Procurement & Supply, Senior Administrative Technician - via email at marcela.tenorio@cucgov.org.

CUC reserves the right to reject any or all bids and waive any imperfection in the bid proposal in the best interest of the government. All bids shall become the property of CUC.

BETTINA G. TERLAJE
Acting Executive Director

MANNY B. SABLAN
Purchasing Administrator

House OKs DPL use of \$1M settlement money

By **FERDIE DE LA TORRE**
ferdie_delatorre@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The House of Representatives passed yesterday a bill that will allow the Department of Public Lands to

use \$1 million in settlement money arising from a DPL lawsuit in order to “enhance” its services.

With all 17 House members present at a session voting “yes,” House Bill 23-91

authored by Rep. Blas Jonathan T. Attao (Ind-Saipan) now goes to the Senate for action.

Vice speaker Joel Camacho (Ind-Saipan) and Reps. Ralph N. Yumul (Ind-Saipan)

and John Paul P. Sablan (Ind-Saipan) were absent but excused from the session.

Attao introduced the bill yesterday and asked that it be placed on the House’s calendar for action.

House members passed the bill without discussions.

House Bill 23-91 would amend Section 711 of the CNMI Public Law 23-09 to allow DPL to use the \$1 million allotted under Civil Case 16-04. That money is settlement funds from Kan Pacific Saipan Ltd. and Im-

perial Pacific International (CNMI) LLC over DPL’s lawsuit against Kan Pacific for breach of the land lease agreement.

Under the bill, an additional \$1 million is appropriated to DPL, bringing the department’s government appropriation to a total of \$5,960,881.

GAZA

From page 1

One of the organizers of Marianas for Palestine in Guam, Monica Flores, attended the House session and described the resolution as a historic moment for the CNMI as it is among the first U.S. territories to call for such a ceasefire.

Group members and supporters applauded after the 17 House members who were present in yesterday’s session adopted House Resolution 23-15 that House Speaker Edmund S. Villagomez (Ind-Saipan) had introduced that day.

According to the resolution, thousands of people from Israel and Palestine have already been killed in a matter of weeks since the conflict broke out, with a significant number of fatalities being children. Gaza is in dire humanitarian crisis that is getting worse with each passing day,

with the only remaining hospital running out of fuel and medical supplies, and over 1.5 million Palestinians facing displacement, homelessness, and starvation.

The CNMI resolution states that it supports U.S. Congress Resolution H.R. 786 and joins other cities in calling on U.S. Congress members to demand an immediate ceasefire; release of all hostages; the unrestricted entry of humanitarian assistance into Gaza; the restoration of food, water, electricity, and medical supplies to Gaza; respect for international law; and calls for a resolution that protects the security of all innocent civilians.

With the adoption of the CNMI resolution, the House clerk shall transmit a certified copy to U.S. President Joe Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris, members of the U.S. Congress, Gov. Arnold I. Palacios, Delegate Gregorio Kilili C. Sablan (D-MP), and Senate President Edith E. DeLeon

Guerrero (D-Saipan).

Before the House’s action yesterday, some leaders of the Marianas for Palestine spoke during the session’s public comments portion to support the resolution.

Suaad Castro Younis, a teacher, recounted that her father, Abed E. Younis, who was a Palestinian, first came to the CNMI in 1971 to learn about the world.

“That was one of his reasons why he left. The other reason was because he was wrongly thrown in jail for six months by the Israeli government. They accused him of being a spy for the British,” she said.

Suaad Younis said her father was no spy, but an artist who painted landscapes.

She has only seen her father cry on two occasions: One was because he couldn’t go to his brother’s funeral in Syria and the other is when he spoke about being in an Israeli jail where he was beaten severely.

When her father was released from prison, that’s

when he decided to leave his hometown, Suaad Younis said, adding that her father chose the CNMI because he could use his voice here to expose injustices and could provide news to the people of Micronesia.

The late Abed Younis was the founding publisher of the *Marianas Variety*.

She said here her father was welcomed and not persecuted for being a Palestinian.

Suaad Younis said her father was proud to be a Palestinian and loudly proclaimed it to the people here.

“Could you imagine not being able to proclaim your own identity in your own homeland?” she asked.

Suaad Younis said they were not in the House to ask lawmakers to support race, religion, and terrorism, but to ask them to support humanity, to request a ceasefire and to end the unnecessary killing and violence against innocent civilians who are mostly

women and children.

She said there is no reason why 20,000-plus innocent people have had to die, to be buried under rubble, to be left on the streets to rot, to die in a hospital bombing.

“Please stop the violence, request a ceasefire and protect the innocent people of Gaza Palestine,” Suaad Younis said.

Businessman Salam Younis, who is son of Abed Younis,

said he is here as a concerned citizen to fight for the passage of the ceasefire resolution.

“In the spirit of the Marianas, we must stand with the oppressed and fight for freedom against apartheid and stop this ongoing genocide,” said a tearful Salam Younis.

A longer version of this story is available at www.saipantribune.com

IPI

From page 1

Stephen Nutting and Michael Chen, filed yesterday the new civil suit against CCC in the U.S. District Court for the NMI.

In its 14-page complaint, IPI alleged that the CCC is illegally taking on a judicial role in its interpretation of the Casino License Agreement, resulting in an unconstitutional impairment of contract and violation of the contracts clause of the U.S and CNMI constitutions, and violation of the due process clauses of the U.S and CNMI constitutions.

In the suit, IPI argues that the law that established the CCC gives the CCC “broad and sometimes exclusive authority” to interpret the CLA and adjudicate disputes arising from the CLA. The statute also gives CCC broad policing power to regulate IPI as a casino operator.

IPI argues that this is problematic, claiming that the CCC is acting in a judicial or quasi-judicial capacity when interpreting the CLA and adjudicating disputes arising from the CLA, particularly when it called for revocation proceeding and suspension proceedings due to IPI’s non-payment of regulatory fees and other fees under the CLA.

Because the CCC has a direct, substantial—and arguably personal—interest in finding IPI in violation of the CLA, and given that the CCC is funded exclusively by the regulatory fees that are ordered to be paid by IPI and its affiliates to CCC, IPI argues that the CCC is an impartial decision maker.

IPI is asking the court for a jury trial on the matter.

As relief, IPI wants the court to declare that the current regulatory “scheme” where IPI is required to pay \$3 million to CCC annually is unconstitutional.

IPI also wants the court to issue an injunction that CCC may not exercise any power granted by CNMI law as long as CCC is not and cannot function as an impartial decision maker.

The casino investor is also asking the court to issue an injunction against the CCC, preventing the assumption of jurisdiction by CCC to interpret the terms of the CLA and/or to adjudicate claims arising out of the CLA.

In addition, IPI seeks a court declaration stating that the assumption of jurisdiction by CCC to interpret the terms of CLA and/or to adjudicate claims arising out of the CLA—either standing alone or in connection with a suspension or revocation proceeding or other enforcement actions as applied to IPI—is unconstitutional. IPI also wants the court to order CCC to vacate, nullify any and all adverse administrative decisions against IPI that were based upon the assumption of jurisdiction by CCC to interpret the terms of CLA and/or to adjudicate claims arising out of the CLA; and for the court to issue an injunction against CCC preventing the enforcement of any CCC order when such orders are “the fruits of an unconstitutional regulatory scheme.”

IPI previously filed a federal suit against CCC, alleging breach of the Casino License Agreement and accusing the CCC of double-charging IPI by imposing an annual regulatory fee of \$3 million on top of other prerequisite fees in order for IPI to do business in the CNMI.

IPI sought relief in the form of restitution for all the years it paid the \$3-million regulatory fee, dating back to 2015 until its last payment in 2019, as it argues that the actions of the CNMI in enacting and CCC in implementing the annual regulatory fee were and are arbitrary, capricious, and unreasonable.

BATTLE

From page 1

Lloyd Coulson Glick, a World War II veteran who served aboard the USS *North Carolina* during the pre-invasion bombings of both Saipan and Guam and whom I had the pleasure of meeting and the honor of giving tours to when he made a pilgrimage to both islands 70 years later.

There was media coverage of his “hero’s return” in our local papers, and on television here and in Guam. However, for those who aren’t familiar, I’ll share Lloyd’s military service origin story as chronicled

in the book, *From Bugle Boy to Battleship*.

1941

Born in California on Dec. 28, 1923, Lloyd Glick was a native 18-year-old boy watching a movie at a theater in downtown Berkeley, California, on Dec 7 1941, when the movie was interrupted to announce Japan’s bombing of Pearl Harbor.

A few days after the attack, Lloyd, already an accomplished trumpet player as 2nd Trumpet Chair for the University of California Symphony, took his desire to serve his country, his passion for music, and his dream of attending the

prestigious U.S. Naval School of Music, and showed up at the Navy recruiting office in San Francisco.

Four months later, with his parents’ signed permission, he joined the U.S. Navy as a way of entering their Naval School program. That decision would ultimately land him the position of Musician Second Class aboard the USS *North Carolina* as a member of the ship’s band while it participated in the bombings of Saipan, Guam, Palau, Pohnpei, and battles throughout World War II’s pivotal Pacific Campaign.

2014

Seventy years later, Lloyd and

his wife, Judy, were booked on a cruise that would dock on both Guam and Saipan in February 2014. It would be the first time Lloyd would return to this region since his military service. They contacted me to arrange tours of both islands, and during the months of planning, we became email buddies and I (secretly) chronicled Lloyd’s story and presented him with a surprise—his biography in book form as part of the welcome ceremonies on both islands.

A longer version of this story is available at www.saipantribune.com

police reportedly fled before the police arrived.

DPS spokesperson Fred Sato told *Saipan Tribune* that the case remains open, and the department continues to investigate the incident.

The alleged victim has already posted this incident on social media in a public request to identify the perpetrators, but has requested that he not be identified in this article.

According to his recounting of events in his Facebook post, the incident happened at around 4:30am on Christmas morning, when the resident was awakened by a noise that he initially ignored. He was roused from bed, though, when he heard another noise

that sounded like something outside his room had fallen.

When he opened his bedroom’s door, he allegedly saw a man whom he described as young, dark-skinned, and slender. He was reportedly wearing a Fokai or Magas jersey with yellow trims, a pair of black shorts, a black and white cap, and a pair of white shoes.

The victim said he yelled at the intruder, who charged at him with a knife in his hand.

The homeowner managed to block his attacker with his bedroom’s door, which he then locked. The homeowner added that when he went to retrieve his firearm, the intruder was pounding on his door, trying to get into the room. That’s

when he yelled at them that he was armed.

The victim noted that as he was calling DPS, he heard the burglar call out to a partner, leading him to believe there were two burglars in his home that night. The two burglars left before the police arrived.

Later, the homeowner learned that the burglars took down his surveillance system and unplugged his internet router.

DPS is seeking the community’s help in locating the two suspects, who are considered armed and dangerous.

Members of the CNMI community are also encouraged to be cautious and aware of their surroundings and to call for help when needed.

DPS

From page 1

who nearly injured a man whose home he had invaded in the middle of the night.

Saipan Tribune learned that the homeowner, a Navy Hill resident, had been awakened over the weekend by unexpected noise outside his bedroom. When he got up to check, that’s when he saw another man inside his home, who charged at him with a knife. Fortunately, the victim was able to lock himself inside his bedroom and called for police assistance, while shouting at the burglar that he has a gun. The burglar and his accom-

Fuel up with **Synergy™ Supreme+** to get **10 entries***



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- Open to all registered Smiles members*
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Synergy™ Supreme+ = 10 entries
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November 3 to December 31, 2023

1st Drawing: November 30, 2023
(10 Winners of Triple J Payless SuperFresh & Truckload store gift certificate)

2nd Drawing: January 5, 2024
(10 Winners of \$250 Mobil gift card)

Mobil would like to clarify that a wrong ad was published on November 17 and December 8, 2023 due to an error in the marketing materials. We sincerely apologize for any inconvenience or confusion caused due to the error.



**Payless SuperFresh
& Truckload Store**

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*Mobil Smiles members must swipe their Smiles card or use their registered mobile number at the time of purchase. Offer is open to registered Saipan Mobil Smiles customers only. No purchase necessary. Terms and conditions applicable. See store or website or call our toll-free hotline at 1-866-486-7751. Monday through Friday from 10am to 7pm for details. All trademarks used herein are trademarks of ExxonMobil Corporation or one of its subsidiaries.

VINCENT J. SEMAN, CNMI Bar No. F-0361
Seman Law Offices, LLC
JET Realty Bldg., Suite 204
P.O. Box 10001 PMB 168
Saipan, MP 96950
Telephone: (670) 323-2115
E-mail: vjseman@semanlaw.com

Attorney for: Petitioner Gill Blas Condominium Owners Association

IN THE SUPERIOR COURT FOR THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

GILL BLAS CONDOMINIUM OWNERS ASSOCIATION, Plaintiff,	CIVIL CASE NO. 23-0023
	NOTICE OF EXECUTION SALE
vs.	
T.R.C., LTD., et al., Defendants.	

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that, pursuant to an Order issued by the Court in this matter on December 4, 2023, the undersigned will sell at public auction to the highest bidder, on the terms and conditions set forth herein below, to satisfy a judgment entered in the above-captioned case in favor of Plaintiff, all of Defendant T.R.C. Ltd.'s interest in and to real property situated in Garapan, Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, described as:

Remaining leasehold interest expiring on October 11, 2044 in Unit #201 of the Gill Blas Condominiums, situated on that portion of Lot No. 003 D 19, as more particularly described in the Gill Blas Sublease and Residential Sales Agreement on File at the Commonwealth Recorder's Office as File No. 96-1156

1. Date, Time and Place of Sale. The sale, open to the general public (including the Plaintiff and Defendant), will be on Friday, January 5, 2024, at 10:00a.m. at Seman Law Offices, LLC, 2nd Floor, JET Building, Gualo Rai, Saipan, CNMI.

2. Inspection of Property. The sale property is located in Garapan, Saipan and may be inspected upon request prior to the public auction. Arrangements for inspecting the premises can be made with Vincent J. Seman from Seman Law Offices, LLC, (670) 323-2115. Failure of the bidder to inspect the property will not constitute grounds for any claim, adjustment or rescission by the bidder.

3. Warranties and Covenants. The property listed in this Notice will be sold in its current condition, "as is". The sale will be held without any warranties or covenants whatsoever, whether express or implied, including but not limited to warranties of merchantability and/or title for any purpose whatsoever, all of which warranties and covenants are hereby expressly disclaimed. Neither the undersigned nor Plaintiff shall be liable for the quality of the property listed for sale, or for any fault or defect in the description thereof. Buyer shall not be entitled to rescission, damages, or any other remedy on account thereof.

4. Conduct of Sale.
a. RESERVE. The sale will be held with reserve. Disclosure of the reserve price on the property offered will be at the sole discretion of the undersigned but will in no case be less than the outstanding judgment, with costs, in favor of Plaintiff.
b. ADVANCE BIDS. Bids may be submitted in advance for the property listed. The highest of such advance bids will be the opening bid for the property at the public auction. Advance bids must be submitted in writing and delivered to Vincent J. Seman, Esq., Seman Law Offices, LLC, Second Floor, JET Building, P.O. Box 10001 PMB 168, Saipan, MP 96950.
c. DISPUTES. The undersigned may resubmit for public auction any property listed in this notice if a dispute arises as to any bid thereon.
d. DEPOSIT. Immediately after a sale is consummated, the successful bidder shall pay the undersigned a deposit of ten percent (10%) of the purchase price. Payment shall be in cash or certified check. The balance of ninety percent (90%) must be paid to the Plaintiff, in care of Seman Law offices, LLC, Trust Account, within three (3) days from the date of sale, in cash or certified check, if the balance is not paid, Plaintiff will retain the deposit as liquidated damages, and may again offer the property for sale.
e. MEMORANDUM OF SALE. If requested by the undersigned, a successful bidder must sign a Memorandum of Sale immediately after the sale of the property is struck at auction.

5. Court Approval Required. The sale of the subject property is subject to approval by the Court. The Auctioneer and Plaintiff make no warranties or promises with respect to Court approval of the sale, including but not limited to the time in which such approval shall be granted. No delay in the granting of Court approval shall be grounds for any claim, adjustment or rescission by the successful bidder. The successful bidder will be promptly notified if and when Court approval is granted.

6. Change of Terms and Conditions of Sale. The undersigned reserves the right to change any of the terms hereof by announcement, written or oral, made before the public auction or at the commencement thereof, and such change or changes, by virtue of this clause, will be binding on all bidders by constructive notice. Plaintiff expressly reserves the right to withdraw the property listed in this Notice before sale or before a bid for such property is accepted, or to request an adjournment of the sale, without notice, at any time before any specific property is sold.

Dated this 8th day of December, 2023.

/s/ Vincent J. Seman
VINCENT J. SEMAN
Attorney for Plaintiff

VINCENT J. SEMAN, CNMI Bar No. F-0361
Seman Law Offices, LLC
JET Realty Bldg., Suite 204
P.O. Box 10001 PMB 168
Saipan, MP 96950
Telephone: (670) 323-2115
E-mail: vjseman@semanlaw.com

Attorney for: Petitioner Gill Blas Condominium Owners Association

IN THE SUPERIOR COURT FOR THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

GILL BLAS CONDOMINIUM OWNERS ASSOCIATION, Plaintiff,	CIVIL CASE NO. 23-0023
	NOTICE OF EXECUTION SALE
vs.	
HARUMI SHRAGA, et al., Defendants.	

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that, pursuant to an Order issued by the Court in this matter on December 4, 2023, the undersigned will sell at public auction to the highest bidder, on the terms and conditions set forth herein below, to satisfy a judgment entered in the above-captioned case in favor of Plaintiff, all of Defendant Harumi Shiraga's interest in and to real property situated in Garapan, Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, described as:

Remaining leasehold interest expiring on October 11, 2044 in Unit #202 of the Gill Blas Condominiums, situated on that portion of Lot No. 003 D 19, as more particularly described in the Gill Blas Sublease and Residential Sales Agreement on File at the Commonwealth Recorder's Office as File No. 96-1156

1. Date, Time and Place of Sale. The sale, open to the general public (including the Plaintiff and Defendant), will be on Friday, January 5, 2024, at 10:00a.m. at Seman Law Offices, LLC, 2nd Floor, JET Building, Gualo Rai, Saipan, CNMI.

2. Inspection of Property. The sale property is located in Garapan, Saipan and may be inspected upon request prior to the public auction. Arrangements for inspecting the premises can be made with Vincent J. Seman from Seman Law Offices, LLC, (670) 323-2115. Failure of the bidder to inspect the property will not constitute grounds for any claim, adjustment or rescission by the bidder.

3. Warranties and Covenants. The property listed in this Notice will be sold in its current condition, "as is". The sale will be held without any warranties or covenants whatsoever, whether express or implied, including but not limited to warranties of merchantability and/or title for any purpose whatsoever, all of which warranties and covenants are hereby expressly disclaimed. Neither the undersigned nor Plaintiff shall be liable for the quality of the property listed for sale, or for any fault or defect in the description thereof. Buyer shall not be entitled to rescission, damages, or any other remedy on account thereof.

4. Conduct of Sale.
a. RESERVE. The sale will be held with reserve. Disclosure of the reserve price on the property offered will be at the sole discretion of the undersigned but will in no case be less than the outstanding judgment, with costs, in favor of Plaintiff.
b. ADVANCE BIDS. Bids may be submitted in advance for the property listed. The highest of such advance bids will be the opening bid for the property at the public auction. Advance bids must be submitted in writing and delivered to Vincent J. Seman, Esq., Seman Law Offices, LLC, Second Floor, JET Building, P.O. Box 10001 PMB 168, Saipan, MP 96950.
c. DISPUTES. The undersigned may resubmit for public auction any property listed in this notice if a dispute arises as to any bid thereon.
d. DEPOSIT. Immediately after a sale is consummated, the successful bidder shall pay the undersigned a deposit of ten percent (10%) of the purchase price. Payment shall be in cash or certified check. The balance of ninety percent (90%) must be paid to the Plaintiff, in care of Seman Law offices, LLC, Trust Account, within three (3) days from the date of sale, in cash or certified check, if the balance is not paid, Plaintiff will retain the deposit as liquidated damages, and may again offer the property for sale.
e. MEMORANDUM OF SALE. If requested by the undersigned, a successful bidder must sign a Memorandum of Sale immediately after the sale of the property is struck at auction.

5. Court Approval Required. The sale of the subject property is subject to approval by the Court. The Auctioneer and Plaintiff make no warranties or promises with respect to Court approval of the sale, including but not limited to the time in which such approval shall be granted. No delay in the granting of Court approval shall be grounds for any claim, adjustment or rescission by the successful bidder. The successful bidder will be promptly notified if and when Court approval is granted.

6. Change of Terms and Conditions of Sale. The undersigned reserves the right to change any of the terms hereof by announcement, written or oral, made before the public auction or at the commencement thereof, and such change or changes, by virtue of this clause, will be binding on all bidders by constructive notice. Plaintiff expressly reserves the right to withdraw the property listed in this Notice before sale or before a bid for such property is accepted, or to request an adjournment of the sale, without notice, at any time before any specific property is sold.

Dated this 8th day of December, 2023.

/s/ Vincent J. Seman
VINCENT J. SEMAN
Attorney for Plaintiff

VINCENT J. SEMAN, CNMI Bar No. F-0361
Seman Law Offices, LLC
JET Realty Bldg., Suite 204
P.O. Box 10001 PMB 168
Saipan, MP 96950
Telephone: (670) 323-2115
E-mail: vjseman@semanlaw.com

Attorney for: Petitioner Gill Blas Condominium Owners Association

IN THE SUPERIOR COURT FOR THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

GILL BLAS CONDOMINIUM OWNERS ASSOCIATION, Plaintiff,	CIVIL CASE NO. 23-0023
	NOTICE OF EXECUTION SALE
vs.	
SHIMA OSADA, et al., Defendants.	

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that, pursuant to an Order issued by the Court in this matter on December 4, 2023, the undersigned will sell at public auction to the highest bidder, on the terms and conditions set forth herein below, to satisfy a judgment entered in the above-captioned case in favor of Plaintiff, all of Defendant Shima Osada's interest in and to real property situated in Garapan, Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, described as:

Remaining leasehold interest expiring on October 11, 2044 in Unit #308 of the Gill Blas Condominiums, situated on that portion of Lot No. 003 D 19, as more particularly described in the Gill Blas Sublease and Residential Sales Agreement on File at the Commonwealth Recorder's Office as File No. 96-1156

1. Date, Time and Place of Sale. The sale, open to the general public (including the Plaintiff and Defendant), will be on Friday, January 5, 2024, at 10:00a.m. at Seman Law Offices, LLC, 2nd Floor, JET Building, Gualo Rai, Saipan, CNMI.

2. Inspection of Property. The sale property is located in Garapan, Saipan and may be inspected upon request prior to the public auction. Arrangements for inspecting the premises can be made with Vincent J. Seman from Seman Law Offices, LLC, (670) 323-2115. Failure of the bidder to inspect the property will not constitute grounds for any claim, adjustment or rescission by the bidder.

3. Warranties and Covenants. The property listed in this Notice will be sold in its current condition, "as is". The sale will be held without any warranties or covenants whatsoever, whether express or implied, including but not limited to warranties of merchantability and/or title for any purpose whatsoever, all of which warranties and covenants are hereby expressly disclaimed. Neither the undersigned nor Plaintiff shall be liable for the quality of the property listed for sale, or for any fault or defect in the description thereof. Buyer shall not be entitled to rescission, damages, or any other remedy on account thereof.

4. Conduct of Sale.
a. RESERVE. The sale will be held with reserve. Disclosure of the reserve price on the property offered will be at the sole discretion of the undersigned but will in no case be less than the outstanding judgment, with costs, in favor of Plaintiff.
b. ADVANCE BIDS. Bids may be submitted in advance for the property listed. The highest of such advance bids will be the opening bid for the property at the public auction. Advance bids must be submitted in writing and delivered to Vincent J. Seman, Esq., Seman Law Offices, LLC, Second Floor, JET Building, P.O. Box 10001 PMB 168, Saipan, MP 96950.
c. DISPUTES. The undersigned may resubmit for public auction any property listed in this notice if a dispute arises as to any bid thereon.
d. DEPOSIT. Immediately after a sale is consummated, the successful bidder shall pay the undersigned a deposit of ten percent (10%) of the purchase price. Payment shall be in cash or certified check. The balance of ninety percent (90%) must be paid to the Plaintiff, in care of Seman Law offices, LLC, Trust Account, within three (3) days from the date of sale, in cash or certified check, if the balance is not paid, Plaintiff will retain the deposit as liquidated damages, and may again offer the property for sale.
e. MEMORANDUM OF SALE. If requested by the undersigned, a successful bidder must sign a Memorandum of Sale immediately after the sale of the property is struck at auction.

5. Court Approval Required. The sale of the subject property is subject to approval by the Court. The Auctioneer and Plaintiff make no warranties or promises with respect to Court approval of the sale, including but not limited to the time in which such approval shall be granted. No delay in the granting of Court approval shall be grounds for any claim, adjustment or rescission by the successful bidder. The successful bidder will be promptly notified if and when Court approval is granted.

6. Change of Terms and Conditions of Sale. The undersigned reserves the right to change any of the terms hereof by announcement, written or oral, made before the public auction or at the commencement thereof, and such change or changes, by virtue of this clause, will be binding on all bidders by constructive notice. Plaintiff expressly reserves the right to withdraw the property listed in this Notice before sale or before a bid for such property is accepted, or to request an adjournment of the sale, without notice, at any time before any specific property is sold.

Dated this 8th day of December, 2023.

/s/ Vincent J. Seman
VINCENT J. SEMAN
Attorney for Plaintiff

VINCENT J. SEMAN, CNMI Bar No. F-0361
Seman Law Offices, LLC
JET Realty Bldg., Suite 204
P.O. Box 10001 PMB 168
Saipan, MP 96950
Telephone: (670) 323-2115
E-mail: vjseman@semanlaw.com

Attorney for: Petitioner Gill Blas Condominium Owners Association

IN THE SUPERIOR COURT FOR THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

GILL BLAS CONDOMINIUM OWNERS ASSOCIATION, Plaintiff,	CIVIL CASE NO. 23-0023
	NOTICE OF EXECUTION SALE
vs.	
KOUSEI FUJIWARA, et al., Defendants.	

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that, pursuant to an Order issued by the Court in this matter on December 4, 2023, the undersigned will sell at public auction to the highest bidder, on the terms and conditions set forth herein below, to satisfy a judgment entered in the above-captioned case in favor of Plaintiff, all of Defendant Kousei Fujiwara's interest in and to real property situated in Garapan, Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, described as:

Remaining leasehold interest expiring on October 11, 2044 in Unit #302 of the Gill Blas Condominiums, situated on that portion of Lot No. 003 D 19, as more particularly described in the Gill Blas Sublease and Residential Sales Agreement on File at the Commonwealth Recorder's Office as File No. 96-1156

1. Date, Time and Place of Sale. The sale, open to the general public (including the Plaintiff and Defendant), will be on Friday, January 5, 2024, at 10:00a.m. at Seman Law Offices, LLC, 2nd Floor, JET Building, Gualo Rai, Saipan, CNMI.

2. Inspection of Property. The sale property is located in Garapan, Saipan and may be inspected upon request prior to the public auction. Arrangements for inspecting the premises can be made with Vincent J. Seman from Seman Law Offices, LLC, (670) 323-2115. Failure of the bidder to inspect the property will not constitute grounds for any claim, adjustment or rescission by the bidder.

3. Warranties and Covenants. The property listed in this Notice will be sold in its current condition, "as is". The sale will be held without any warranties or covenants whatsoever, whether express or implied, including but not limited to warranties of merchantability and/or title for any purpose whatsoever, all of which warranties and covenants are hereby expressly disclaimed. Neither the undersigned nor Plaintiff shall be liable for the quality of the property listed for sale, or for any fault or defect in the description thereof. Buyer shall not be entitled to rescission, damages, or any other remedy on account thereof.

4. Conduct of Sale.
a. RESERVE. The sale will be held with reserve. Disclosure of the reserve price on the property offered will be at the sole discretion of the undersigned but will in no case be less than the outstanding judgment, with costs, in favor of Plaintiff.
b. ADVANCE BIDS. Bids may be submitted in advance for the property listed. The highest of such advance bids will be the opening bid for the property at the public auction. Advance bids must be submitted in writing and delivered to Vincent J. Seman, Esq., Seman Law Offices, LLC, Second Floor, JET Building, P.O. Box 10001 PMB 168, Saipan, MP 96950.
c. DISPUTES. The undersigned may resubmit for public auction any property listed in this notice if a dispute arises as to any bid thereon.
d. DEPOSIT. Immediately after a sale is consummated, the successful bidder shall pay the undersigned a deposit of ten percent (10%) of the purchase price. Payment shall be in cash or certified check. The balance of ninety percent (90%) must be paid to the Plaintiff, in care of Seman Law offices, LLC, Trust Account, within three (3) days from the date of sale, in cash or certified check, if the balance is not paid, Plaintiff will retain the deposit as liquidated damages, and may again offer the property for sale.
e. MEMORANDUM OF SALE. If requested by the undersigned, a successful bidder must sign a Memorandum of Sale immediately after the sale of the property is struck at auction.

5. Court Approval Required. The sale of the subject property is subject to approval by the Court. The Auctioneer and Plaintiff make no warranties or promises with respect to Court approval of the sale, including but not limited to the time in which such approval shall be granted. No delay in the granting of Court approval shall be grounds for any claim, adjustment or rescission by the successful bidder. The successful bidder will be promptly notified if and when Court approval is granted.

6. Change of Terms and Conditions of Sale. The undersigned reserves the right to change any of the terms hereof by announcement, written or oral, made before the public auction or at the commencement thereof, and such change or changes, by virtue of this clause, will be binding on all bidders by constructive notice. Plaintiff expressly reserves the right to withdraw the property listed in this Notice before sale or before a bid for such property is accepted, or to request an adjournment of the sale, without notice, at any time before any specific property is sold.

Dated this 8th day of December, 2023.

/s/ Vincent J. Seman
VINCENT J. SEMAN
Attorney for Plaintiff

A. Samoa's Radewagen focused on veterans in '23

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Delegate Uifa’atali Amata Radewagen (R-A. Samoa) focused on veterans throughout 2023, and is providing a year-end summary of the efforts in the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee, one of her three committee assignments in Congress.

At the start of the year, Radewagen was named vice chairman of the committee, which is led by chair Mike Bost (R-IL.), and she serves on the Veterans Health Subcommittee, her top selection on behalf of American Samoa’s veterans, as well as the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, tasked with oversight of the Veterans’ Administration. She also served as chairwoman of the Women Veterans Task Force.

“I so appreciate our veterans, as they provide leadership in American Samoa throughout our community, and the United States,” said Radewagen. “I treasure the opportunity to work on behalf of our veterans in Congress.”

Through hearings and legislation, the committee has directed attention to implementing the major legislative overhaul efforts of recent years, such as the PACT Act, while listening to veterans at every opportunity and working to improve services in general, health care, and response times, while reducing backlogs, continuing the updates in VA technology, and insisting on VA personnel reforms.

In January, Radewagen highlighted nine new veterans services bills completed at the close

of the prior Congress that became law or took effect in January, such as the bipartisan Faster Payments to Veterans’ Survivors Act of 2022, which she co-sponsored. The others were the bipartisan Guaranteeing Healthcare Access to Personnel Who Served Act, a bipartisan effort addressing gaps in veteran health care to improve VA reach to serve veterans better in hard-to-reach places; The Veterans Prostate Cancer Treatment and Research Act; The Reaching Every Homeless Veteran Act; The VA Supply Chain Resiliency Act; The Department of Veterans Affairs Provider Accountability Act; The Rural Veterans Travel Enhancement Act; The Post-9/11 Veterans’ Mental Health Care Improvement Act; The Revising and Expediting Actions for the Crisis Hotline for Veterans Act.

Also in January, as she does yearly, she celebrated her announcements of those selected to the prestigious U.S. Service Academies. Also yearly, she visits and tours again our local Eni F. H. Faleomavaega VA Clinic, as she did recently, and meets often with American Samoa’s veterans seeking VA services in Honolulu as well as health officials at Tripler Center.

In February, as original co-sponsor, she took part in introducing the bipartisan Governing Unaccredited Representatives Defrauding VA Benefits Act, to protect veterans from predatory claim sharks, a bill supported by numerous veterans national organizations.

In March, which is when
See VETERANS on Page 7



NORTHERN MARIANAS HOUSING CORPORATION
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Email: nmhc@nmhc.gov.mp Website: http://www.cnmi-cdbgdr.com

INVITATION FOR BID (IFB)
NMHC IFB 2024-004
(This ad is paid by NMHC by HUD funds)
BID SUBMISSION DATE: February 13, 2024, 2:00 p.m.

Construction of New 1.0 MG Kagman Water Tank Project

Project Package will be available on December 28, 2023, at the NMHC Central Office in Garapan, Saipan, during regular working hours (7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.) Monday thru Friday except CNMI holidays. A non-refundable payment of One-Hundred Dollars (\$100.00) is required for each set of the project package. Payment must be made payable to NMHC and receipt of payment must be presented when obtaining the project package at the reception counter.

The provisions on the NMHC Procurement regulations, NMIAC 100-60-725 AND 100-60-730 Prohibiting Gratuities, Kickbacks and Contingent Fees shall apply.

A Mandatory Pre-Bid Conference will be held at the NMHC Central Office Conference located in Garapan, Saipan on **January 09, 10:00 a.m.** In addition, a Mandatory site Visit/Inspection of the project site will be conducted immediately after the Pre-Bid Conference. Failure to attend both the Mandatory Pre-bid conference and the Mandatory site Visit/Inspection will be considered a non-responsive bidder.

For more information, contact Mr. Jacob Muna, Office Manager, at (670) 234-9447 or via email at officemanager@nmhcgov.net during business hours, 7:30am – 4:30pm Monday through Friday, except CNMI holidays.

/s/ JESSE S. PALACIOS
Corporate Director

/s/ MERCED “MARCIE” M. TOMOKANE
Chairwoman
NMHC Board of Directors

VETERANS

From page 6

committees are organized and the schedule is under-way, Radewagen took part in oversight hearings on VA accountability, welcomed a VFW delegation in the congressional office to talk priorities, spoke up about women veterans care issues in a VA oversight hearing, apprised veterans of congressional oversight to correct inaccuracies on the Korean War Memorial's Wall of Remembrance, participated in a bipartisan oversight letter to the VA secretary bipartisan letter to address discrepancies in suicide data and insist on transparency; and highlighted HVAC passage of these four bills: H.R. 502, To amend title 38, United States Code, to ensure that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs repays members of the Armed Forces for certain contributions made by such members towards Post-9/11 Educational Assistance; H.R. 815, the RELIEVE Act; H.R. 753, VA COST SAVINGS Enhancements Act; and H.R. 1226, the Wounded Warrior Access Act.

Also in March, she visited service members, future veterans, in touring nine military installations on the U.S. east coast, including each branch of the Armed Forces, and seeing many of our Toa o Samoa.

In May, the House passed the veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2023, signed into law in June. This followed the 2023 COLA increase of 8.7%, through a 2022 bill, the largest increase in many years.

Also in May, the House passed H.R. 1669, the VET-TEC Authorization Act of 2023, supporting veterans educational goals in technology courses, and H.R. 366, the Korean American VALOR Act.

Radewagen took part in the 25th Annual Women in Military Service Wreath Laying Ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery in May with the bipartisan Congressional Women's Caucus, in which each member of Congress speaks in honor of a selected woman service member.

She also spoke in a joint hearing of two veterans' Subcommittees—she serves on both—the Health Subcommittee, and Oversight and Investigations, examining challenges in VA health care hiring, staffing, and retaining.

That month, Congress got a first look at the the Fiscal Year 2024 Military Construction, Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, which fully funds the VA plus an \$18 billion increase over 2023 in discretionary programs, boosts Pacific deterrence and projects at Arlington National Cemetery.

Last June 12, Radewagen



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Delegate Uifa'atali Amata Radewagen (R-A. Samoa) holds the family photo of veteran Henry Saaga.

highlighted Women Veterans Recognition Day, specifically honoring women who have served in the Armed Forces.

Also in June she helped introduce as original cosponsor, the bipartisan Care for Compact of Free Association Veterans Act.

In June, leading up to the 4th of July, she visited Normandy's Wall of the Missing in Normandy American Cemetery, Colleville-sur-Mer, France, specially remembering the heroic service and sacrifice of Henry Saaga enshrined there. He landed on Omaha Beach and fought with valor in the hedgerows, earning the Bronze Star and Purple Heart. She went on to visit several Veterans sites, American military cemeteries, and battle memorials there.

In July, Radewagen helped

introduce the bipartisan Veteran Service Recognition Act as original cosponsor, an effort led by ranking member Mark Takano (D-CA), which Radewagen has supported with public remarks, to help U.S. veterans who are noncitizen/non-U.S. nationals obtain legal permanent resident status, and assist noncitizen U.S. service members in applying for citizenship if desired during basic training.

Also in July, she highlighted HVAC passage of 11 bills including two she worked for as cosponsor: The Restore Department of Veterans Affairs Accountability Act, H.R. 4278, and the bipartisan Elizabeth Dole Home Care Act of 2023, H.R. 542.

In a busy July, she also toured Landstuhl Medical Center, an Army medical fa-

cility, for input on telehealth and services to geographically remote locations.

This year, in August, she was able to lay a wreath at the American War Memorial, Guadalcanal, and take a special visit to the Coastwatchers Memorial in Honiara, as Uifa'atali Peter T. Coleman served in Solomon Islands during World War II aboard a ship assigned to the Army placing and supporting these brave Coastwatchers.

In September, in both a letter to the VA secretary and in an oversight hearing, she strongly urged adherence to Buy American law and federal policies in buying practices, as this remains a key issue for the U.S. government regarding buying American produced tuna.

Also in September, Radewagen co-led introduction of the bipartisan Passports for Purple Hearts Act, to waive fees and specially honor Purple Heart Veterans.

In November, the committee released a findings report on the work of the Women Veterans Task Force, chaired by Radewagen, which led fact finding roundtable meetings with women veterans on their specific challenges in health-care, educational goals, small business efforts and more.

Also that month, Radewagen congratulated Air Force veteran Fa'alagiga Nina

Tuā'au-Glaudé upon her appointment to advise the VA on behalf of local and Pacific region veterans, putting into effect the legislation that Radewagen co-led creating this position, H.R. 3730, as an original cosponsor.

On Veterans Day, Radewagen observed the federal holiday with a statement thanking and honoring Veterans. Throughout the year she also honored Armed Forces Day and Military Appreciation Month in May, Purple Heart Day, as well as birthdays of the U.S. Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard, also commemorating D-Day, the Battle of Midway,

and Pearl Harbor Day.

In December, the House passed three veterans bills from the committee, including the bipartisan Elizabeth Dole Home Care Act that Radewagen cosponsored.

Also in December, HVAC passed 11 more bills for consideration by the full House, two of which Radewagen cosponsored: H.R. 1753, Jax Act, named after female Veteran Jaclyn "Jax" Scott; and H.R. 522, Deliver for Veterans Act, sponsored by Delegate Jim Moylan of Guam. Work on these bills will continue in 2024 for final passage to be signed into law. (PR)

IN THE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

Li Fen Lu Delos Reyes
(Name of Mother/Father) | FCD PA CIVIL
ACTION NO. 23-0491

A.P.L.D.R.
(Name(s) of Child(ren)) | SUMMONS FOR
FOR PUBLICATION

Plaintiffs,
vs.
Patrick Pinaula Delos Reyes
(Name of the Mother/Father) |
Defendant

TO THE ABOVE-NAMED DEFENDANT:
YOU ARE HEREBY SUMMONED and notified to file any answer you wish to make to the Complaint, a copy of which is on file with the Court, within thirty (30) days after service of the Summons upon you, and to deliver or mail a copy of your answer to the Plaintiff whose address is P.O. Box 7350 SVRB, Saipan MP 96950 as soon as practical after filing your answer or sending it to the Clerk of Courts for filing.
Your answer should be in writing and filed with the Clerk of this Court at Susupe, Saipan, MP 96950. It may be prepared for you by your counsel and sent to the Clerk of this Court by messenger or Mail. It is not necessary for you to appear personally until further notice. If you fail to file and answer in accordance with this Summons, Judgement by Default may be taken against you for relief in the Complaint.
Dated this 22nd day of December, 2023.

/s/
Clerk of Court

IN THE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

SHERYL G. DELA CRUZ
Petitioner,
vs.
RANEL H. DELA CRUZ
Respondent,

FCD-DI CIVIL
ACTION NO.
23-0495
SUMMONS FOR
PUBLICATION

TO THE ABOVE NAME RESPONDENT:
YOU ARE HEREBY SUMMONED and notified to file any answer you wish to make to the Complaint, a copy of which is on file with the court, within thirty (30) days after service of the Summons upon you, and to deliver or mail a copy of your answer to the Petitioner whose address is P.O. Box 7777 SVRB, Saipan, MP 96950, as soon as practical after filing your answer or sending it to the Clerk of Courts for filing.
Your answer should be in writing and filed with the Clerk of this Court at P.O. Box 500307 Susupe, Saipan, MP 96950. It may be prepared for you by your counsel and sent to the Clerk of this Court by messenger or Mail. It is not necessary for you to appear personally until further notice. If you fail to file and answer in accordance with this summons, judgement by default may be taken against you for relief in the complaint.
Dated this 22nd day of December 2023.

/s/
Clerk of Court

NMPASI
NORTHERN MARIANAS PROTECTION & ADVOCACY SYSTEMS, INC.
PO Box 503529, Saipan, MP 96950 Tel. Nos.: (670) 235-7273/4 - Fax: (670) 235-7275

Request for Proposal

The Northern Marianas Protection and Advocacy Systems, Inc. (NMPASI) is soliciting proposals for Audit of financial and compliance audit for fiscal year ending **September 30, 2023**. NMPASI is designated, federally funded protection and advocacy system for persons with disabilities in the CNMI. NMPASI uses a variety of individual and systems advocacy approaches to protect people's rights, including legal and administrative remedies, legislative, policy change and trainings. Proposals for the financial and compliance audit shall be submitted to NMPASI, P.O. Box 503529, Saipan, MP 96950 no later than January 19, 2024. The audit shall be performed in compliance with the following guidelines:

1. Generally Accepted Auditing Standards;

2. OMB Circular A-133; and

3. Compliance with the general Requirements Applicable to Federal Financial Assistance Program.

Award will be based on specific factor such as prior experience, technical competence, ability to meet the deadline and price in this order. The contract for this audit will be awarded no later than **December 30, 2023**, and a final audit report shall be completed by **March 15, 2024**. A list of specific audit requirements and Agency's profile are available at NMPASI office, Marianas Business Plaza, 5th floor Room 505. Any questions regarding this matter can be addressed to Mr. Gregory Borja, Executive Director at (670) 235-7273/4 (voice) or email at gborja@nmpasi.org.

NORTHERN MARIANAS HOUSING CORPORATION
Community Development Block Grant - Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) Program

JOB VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

OPENING DATE: December 28, 2023 CLOSING DATE: January 19, 2024 TIME: 4:00 P.M.

NMHC JVA No.	Positions:	Salary
2024-004	CDBG-DR Accountant	\$25,000.00-\$30,000.00 per annum- UNGRADED

Employment application form, detailed job description, qualification requirements and other information may be accessed at www.nmhcgov.net or www.cnmi-cdbgdr.com.

Applicants may submit their applications through the following options: Submission at the at the NMHC Central Office in Garapan, Saipan; or at the Drop Box located in front of the NMHC Central Office building; or email application and documents to officemanager@nmhcgov.net.

All applicants must complete and submit the NMHC Employment Application Form together with required documents that are listed in the Employment Application Package. Failure to provide the required documents will result in automatic disqualification. NMHC and all its properties are drug-free zones; therefore, selected applicant will be subject to pre-employment drug screening.

It is the policy of the Northern Marianas Housing Corporation (NMHC) that the merit system will be applied and administered according to the principle of equal opportunity for all citizens and nationals as defined by its personnel regulations and the Northern Marianas Commonwealth Constitution regardless of age, race, sex, religion, political affiliation or belief, marital status, disability or place of origin.

For inquiries, please contact Mr. Jacob Muna, Office Manager, at (670) 234-6866/9447 or by email to officemanager@nmhcgov.net. NMHC is a fair housing agency and an equal opportunity provider, lender and employer.

/s/
JESSE S. PALACIOS
Corporate Director

Opinion

Hafa Adai!

Saipan Tribune

THE CNMI'S FIRST DAILY NEWSPAPER

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Mark Rabago EDITOR
mark_rabago@saipantribune.com

MEMBER

AP The Associated Press

Pacific Islands News Association

EDITORIAL

Don't give in to gloom about Ukraine

Nearly two years ago, Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine unified European nations, reinvigorated the trans-Atlantic alliance and forged a spirit of rare bipartisanship in Washington. Now that resolve is fraying. President Joe Biden's administration and the European Union are struggling to deliver aid for Ukraine's military and budget, with even some of the country's staunchest supporters expressing doubts about its battlefield prospects and calling for negotiations to end the war.

This frustration is perhaps understandable, but it's misguided. It ignores the enormous sacrifices Ukraine's people have made to defend their freedom and push back against Russian aggression—and underestimates the ability of Ukraine's military to regain the advantage, if given sufficient weaponry. Abandoning the war effort now would wreck the West's credibility and ultimately endanger the democracies supporting Ukraine's defense as much as Ukraine itself.

It's true that Ukraine's forces failed to advance this year as much as leaders inside and outside the country had hoped for. Russia's defensive capabilities and willingness to absorb huge casualties have proved formidable. And while there is much finger-pointing between Ukraine and the West about tactics and decision-making, the supply of weaponry was too little and too late to match the ambitions of the counteroffensive.

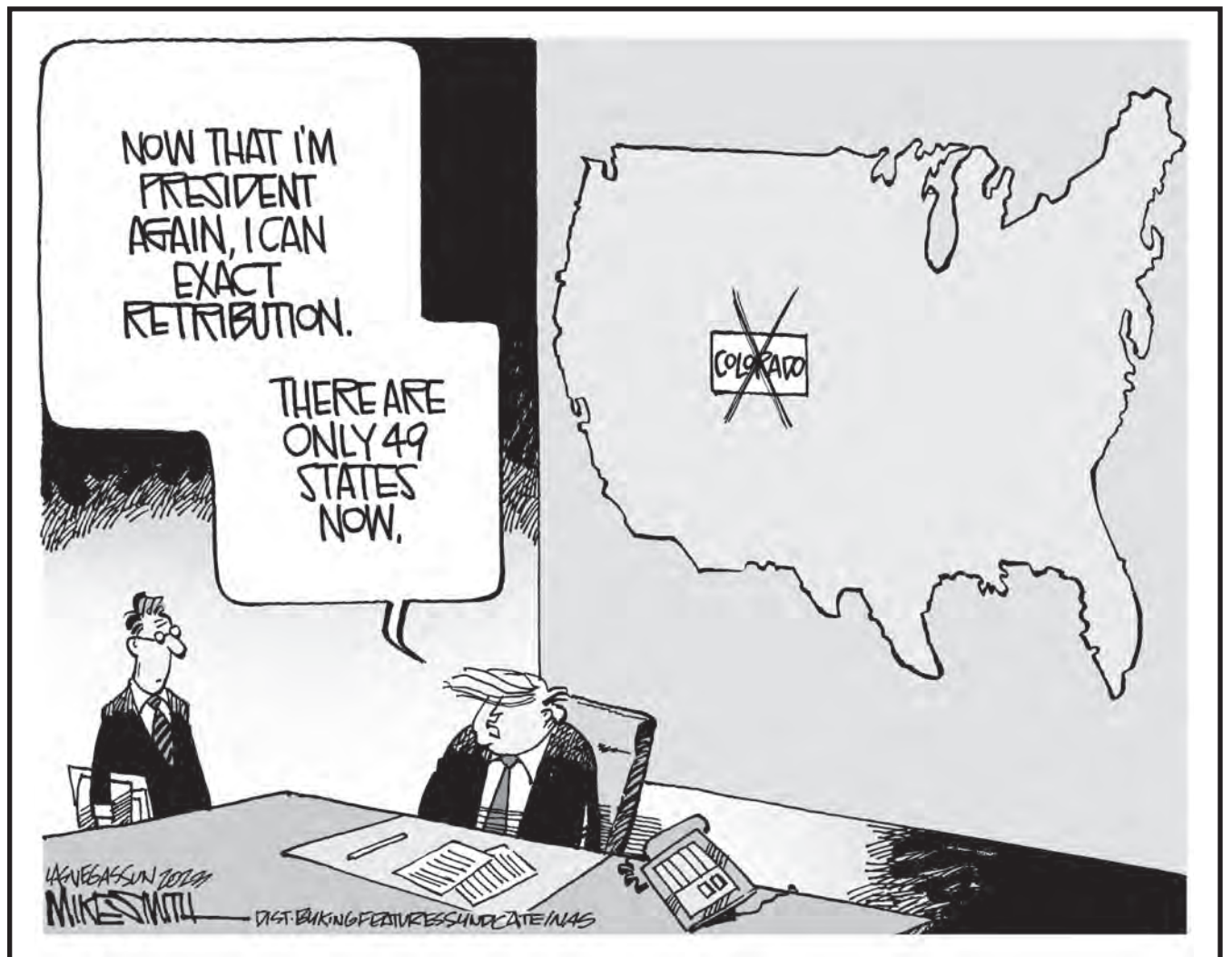
Acknowledging these shortcomings is very different from defeatism. The answer isn't to do less. Putin shows no interest in negotiations or any history of abiding by agreements he's made. He has every reason to wait for US and European resolve to collapse so that he can complete his objective of subjugating Ukraine. In this war of attrition, the West must adapt its response to provide more sustainable support over the long term.

What should that entail? In the coming months, providing additional ammunition, long-range missiles, air-defense systems, drones and fighter aircraft will remain essential. Without the continued flow of Western arms, Ukraine will be unable to hold onto the territory it controls, let alone seize more. At the same time, the US and Europe should ramp up Ukraine's own ability to produce weapons by providing incentives for joint ventures with Ukrainian defense companies to build drone factories, anti-mining equipment and other defense-industrial capacities.

Ukraine also needs renewed budgetary support, which should be tied to continued demands on Ukraine's government for transparency and reform. The EU's decision to start the long process of membership talks with Ukraine and Moldova sends the right message of commitment. Meanwhile, the West should tighten sanctions against Russia and build better enforcement mechanisms to strengthen the price cap on Russian oil and block the Kremlin's ability to import dual-use technologies. While Russia's economy has found ways to adapt, sanctions are necessary to maintain pressure on Putin and send a signal of solidarity.

Democratic leaders must also do a better job of communicating at home. It bears repeating that Putin's invasion is a wholly

See DON'T on Page 9



Safeguarding democracy from artificial intelligence

By **STEVEN KULL** and **JP THOMAS**
THE BALTIMORE SUN

It was a simple blessing: a giving of thanks for love, friendship and commitment. Yet this prayer, read at a church in Suffolk, east England, on Sunday morning, has become a lightning rod for England's premier religious institution.

After midnight Saturday, the Church of England—the state church, whose supreme governor is the king—sanctioned same-sex couples to be blessed for the first time in its 489-year history. Backlash to this move, as well as those recently made by other denominations, highlights the urgent challenge now facing these ailing religious institutions: Keep up with the times, or die out completely.

Just one day after the new rules over same-sex blessings (which for now can only take place within an existing service) came into force, Pope Francis enacted a similar blueprint for Roman Catholics. On Monday, he approved blessings for same-sex couples—with the caveat that they could go ahead “without any type of ritualisation or offering the impression of a marriage.” Even with that small print, it was a marked change from the Catholic Church's decree two years ago that prayers for same-sex pairs would remain verboten as “God does not bless sin.”

The pope's seal of approval should be an unequivocal sign that Christianity is ready to edge into the 21st century. But for the Church of England, senior figures backing the LGBTQ+ cause has so far inflamed tensions.

Support for blessing gay couples from Justin Welby and Stephen Cottrell, the archbishops respectively of Canterbury and York (the highest offices within the church), has in recent months led to calls for Welby to resign. Cottrell last month admitted that the matter is “stretching us to breaking point.” After almost a decade of debate, some bishops responded to last week's rule change announcement by accusing the General Synod, the church's ruling body, of creating a “tectonic divide” that may never heal. (The American counterpart denomination, the Episcopal Church, is further ahead, having allowed same-sex marriage since 2015.)

It's all very well for religious conservatives to maintain that doctrine should be observed as it was written millenniums ago. But the church's failure to address changing social mores is playing out in half-filled pews across the Western world. Between 2013 and 2019, attendance at Sunday services in England dropped by 15%; one report estimated a further 19% fall from 2019 levels, with some

churches shutting completely and others being rented out instead.

Some U.S. congregations are at a similar crossroads. Since the United Methodist Church eased off on enforcing its ban on gay and lesbian ministers and same-sex unions in 2019, a quarter of its around 30,000 U.S. churches will have broken away completely by this year's Dec. 31 departure approval deadline. Meanwhile, a June Gallup poll reported a decline in church attendance of at least 10% in the U.S. since 2012.

Religious institutions appear to have missed a fundamental truth: In the age of dwindling devotion, the question is no longer what people can offer their church, but what it can offer them. Refusals to accept gay marriage—support for which remains at an all-time high in the U.S.—only highlight how out of step with society the traditionalists have become.

Although there is no denying that hard-liners might be alienated by change—and that fear of it can be powerful—it's wrong for aging institutions (which, between the church and the monarchy, England has its share of) to assume their worshipers can't adapt.

As I looked around at the small, primarily white-haired congregation in Suffolk, who after the service clutched celebratory glasses of fizz to toast the newly blessed couple, it was hard to understand the church's apparent panic. One 99-year-old congregant praised the couple, two female vicars, for breathing new life into the church. Others attended after news of the service made headlines (one told me she was considering joining the congregation as a result). The vast majority was simply there to worship quietly, without inquiring into the personal lives of others, as they had done for decades.

The concern going forward is that these same-sex blessings are not the peace offering that some churches appear to think; straddling the fence may win them no friends. Campaigners lament that same-sex couples are still denied the rights of heterosexual believers—a matter the Church of England has said won't progress before 2025. Kicking the can down the road is unlikely to help their cause, either.

Rather than debating the minutiae of religious dogma, the church (along with many other denominations) must choose between embracing our age, or going on living like it's 1534. If they pick the latter, emptying churches around the world suggest their chance of surviving another 489 years is very slim indeed.

Steven Kull serves as director of the Program for Public Consultation at the University of Maryland. He is the founder and president of Voice of the People. JP Thomas (jpthomas@vop.org) is vice president of Voice of the People and director of Voice of the People Action.

EDITORIAL POLICY

Letters to the editor must include the NAME, VILLAGE ADDRESS, and CONTACT NUMBER of the contributor. Letters that do not have these information will immediately be trashed. Contributions consisting of 500 words or less have more chances of getting published. The *Saipan Tribune* reserves the right to publish a contribution or not; the right to edit submissions for length, accuracy, and clarity; and the right to publish and distribute contributions in print, electronic, or other media formats. Submissions may be sent via snail mail to the 2nd Floor, JP Center, Beach Road, Garapan, Saipan, 96950; fax (670) 235-3740; e-mail to editor@saipantribune.com; or through our website at www.saipantribune.com.

US soldiers at risk of suffering brain injuries from their own weapons

By **DANIEL JOHNSON**
CHICAGO TRIBUNE

The military is currently experiencing a mental health crisis, with suicide now the second leading cause of death for service members. Brain injuries suffered by service members are a big part of this crisis, and new information has revealed the risk that service members face even if they don't deploy.

A recent New York Times investigation into artillery crews serving in Iraq and Syria found that those service members suffered from brain injuries caused by the firing of their own weapons. These injuries are also coming from shoulder mounted weapons and may have also played a role in the mental state of the Maine mass shooter.

I served with many of the men in The New York Times article on the artillery crews in Iraq and Syria and know them well. I have seen what effects these injuries have had on their lives and have experienced it myself. What happened to us doesn't have to happen to other service members, if the Department of Defense and Congress acts.

It's hard to explain how it feels to be behind an artillery piece when it fires: the force from the explosion that threw a hundred-pound shell for miles, knocking the breath out of you and causing a shudder in your bones. When the dust clouds began to form from the sand blown off the walls and ground, filling our noses with soot, and staining our uniforms to the point they sometimes looked white, I also often had a dull pain in my head like I had just gotten hit in the face.

It's worse if you're inside or under something; one day I was asleep under a truck when an M777 howitzer suddenly fired a few

feet away, the shock wave forcefully ejected me from my slumber and threw me in a state best described as being between consciousness—the world spinning as I tried to remember where I was.

Now imagine experiencing that feeling over 6,000 times, in the span of less than nine months, like the artillery unit I was with. Or tens of thousands of times, like some of the Marine artillery crews who supported operations in Syria. The high amount of rounds my other units fired during the war on the Islamic State is something that U.S. military wasn't prepared for, acknowledging as much in a report published in 2019 on the amount of injuries being suffered due to this heavy rate of firing.

I didn't realize that Iraq was just the beginning of hellish experience I would have as I was forced to navigate a care system that told me that these explosions somehow hadn't caused me lasting damage, which included headaches and effects on my mental state. The insidious thing about these types of wounds is that service members often have to attempt to convince the military doctors that they need help. To this day I still suffer from difficulties.

Traumatic brain injuries (TBIs) caused by explosions and other hazards during military service have been linked to mental health issues, including suicide; research published just this August analyzing a cohort of almost 900,000 Service Members found that individuals with a history of military-identified TBI had significantly higher rates of new-onset mental health conditions than those without. Additional research has shown that among service members who have suffered moderate traumatic brain injuries (MTBIs) in the military, they have a suicide rate that is almost three times the national average.

I remember the night my head started to ring like a doorbell in northern Iraq. It was a dull throbbing pain and I sat there

rubbing the sore spot as I tried to go sleep, wondering what was going on. When I got home, I could literally feel something in my head before my mood shifted. It is a horrifying feeling to know that something may be wrong with you and worse, there's nothing you can do about it as your life is affected in a multitude of ways. These blast injuries can occur not only in combat, but also during training.

The first step toward any attempt to tackle this problem starts with the DOD. Congress in 2020 asked the that the DOD measure blast pressure troops were exposed to and track blast exposure history routinely, but that still hasn't been done almost four years later.

The thing about military health care is that if there's no record of an event occurring, then you're not going to get treatment on active duty or as a veteran. The DOD also needs to ensure the best practices to protect against TBI are being undertaken, service members are being properly tested for TBI symptoms, and that TBI exposure is properly tracked in service member medical records. This is not currently happening. The scale of this problem is not even fully understood—and for artillery personnel, there's no way to avoid exposure to these types of injury unless current practices change. Thousands may be at risk.

The issue of these injuries won't just end with us. Outside of artillery units, service members continue to suffer TBIs from attacks in Syria and Iraq even as the DOD has still not properly enacted its own protocols. Just like us, they're going to eventually come back home as they suffer from an illness that has no clear answer. They don't have to, though.

If the DOD takes the right steps, or at least enforces the measures it already has in place, hundreds if not thousands of service members can be saved.

Daniel Johnson is a doctoral fellow at the Hussman School of Media and Journalism at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Johnson was a journalist in the Army in 2016 in Iraq and has contributed reporting to The New York Times and The Washington Post.

Are we as a nation ready for the next big threat? What Oct. 7 and the pandemic have taught us

By **KELLY MCKINNEY**
CHICAGO TRIBUNE

I was stunned by the early morning headline that appeared in my email. According to The New York Times, Israeli officials had known about Hamas' plan for more than a year before it launched its Oct. 7 attacks.

This could not be true. The Israel that I have come to know over the past 22 years is a beacon of vigilance, with a hard-bit approach to threat protection that it has learned through decades of painful experience. And it has generously shared its expertise with our professionals in New York and around the world.

Yet in this case instead of acting, Israeli military and intelligence dismissed this startling revelation as "aspirational." In New York City, we call this "talking away the job," and it is a sure sign that a healthy complacency has taken hold.

Complacency comes in a variety of forms—misplaced hope, denial, faith, fatalism—but the results are always the same. It leaves you flat-footed in the face of fast-moving threats. It breeds failure in the form of misery and destruction. It prevents you from doing the things that you need to do to avoid a worst-case outcome.

I have no doubt that the last remnants of Israeli complacency were swept away by the horrors perpetrated by Hamas terrorists on that terrible day. Here in New York, a never-ending stream of crises—from a terror attack and a pandemic to blizzards, power blackouts and hurricanes—has removed any complacency that we may have had about these external threats. The

same cannot be said about the U.S. overall.

Consider that despite two decades of planning for a pandemic, with just 4% of the world's population, the U.S. accounted for more than 20% of the world's coronavirus cases and deaths. Even worse than that is that we don't even know why.

Other developed nations have accounted for their performance. This month, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak spent nearly five hours testifying before the United Kingdom COVID-19 inquiry about his role in the government's response to the pandemic. Similar investigations have been completed in Canada, Australia and Japan. Yet the U.S. has not ventured to take that deep dive. Therefore, nobody can say with certainty what went wrong and when, or who's to blame and why.

Now consider another news story. This one is about a mysterious wave of childhood pneumonia that was sweeping through China a few weeks ago. Images on media and social media were eerily similar to those we saw in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, with patients packed into hospitals and weary doctors and nurses working in hazmat suits and masks.

The director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention testified before Congress that there was nothing to worry about, that there is no danger of another pandemic. Assuming that Dr. Mandy Cohen is not herself talking away the job, this is very good news. Because what would we do if there was another pandemic on the way? Does anybody know the plan?

The bad news is that pandemics are just one of the many risks that inhabit the threat-rich landscape that we all face. And

as a forewarned and slow-moving type of catastrophe, it is actually among the easiest to deal with.

The antidote to complacency is vigilance—being alert and observant to danger. Vigilance also means knowing that when the next catastrophe happens, we will know who will bring the nation together and from which direction the cavalry will come.

Because that next catastrophe will start suddenly and with great intensity, with its biggest problems and greatest needs coming in its earliest hours. These early hours—the so-called golden hours—will be a time of maximum chaos. The actions we take then will determine our fate.

The question is whether we will do this the easy way, by figuring it out beforehand, or the hard way, in the chaotic aftermath of the next black swan.

Kelly McKinney is a former deputy commissioner at the New York City Office of Emergency Management and chief disaster officer at the American Red Cross in Greater New York. He is the author of Moment of Truth: The Nature of Catastrophes and How to Prepare for Them.






DON'T

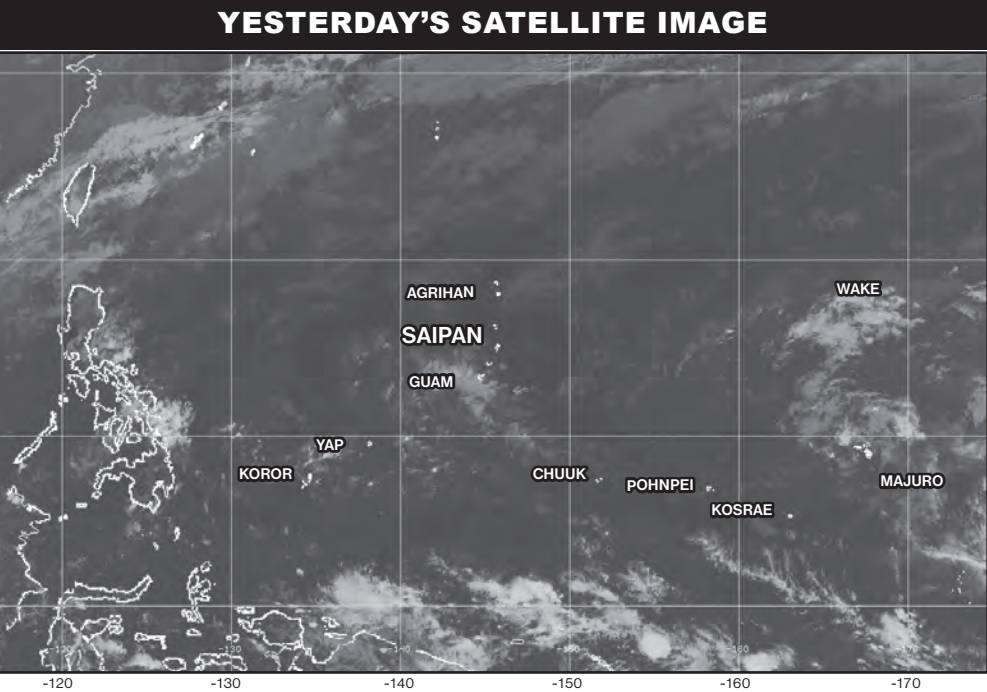
From page 8

unprovoked war in which the intention is conquest, prosecuted through deliberate attacks on civilian centers and chillingly documented war crimes. Supporting Ukraine has come remarkably cheap for Western militaries and is providing a boon for US and European defense firms.

It's impossible to predict when and how the war will end. But defeat would carry steep strategic costs, damage global food and energy security, and embolden Putin to go further. However daunting the challenges faced by Ukraine and its partners in the year ahead, failure isn't an option.

The Weather

5-DAY FORECAST FOR SAIPAN AND TINIAN									
TODAY		FRIDAY		SATURDAY		SUNDAY		MONDAY	
									
Partly cloudy with isolated showers. East winds 15 to 20 mph.		Breezy. Partly cloudy with isolated showers. Northeast winds 20 to 25 mph.		Partly sunny with a 20 percent chance of showers.		Breezy. Partly sunny with a 30 percent chance of showers.		Partly sunny with a 30 percent chance of showers.	
86	77°	86	77°	86	77°	86	77°	86	77°



PICTURE TIME: 7:23 AM WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2023

Western North Pacific between equator and 25N from 130E to 180.

Satellite reveals a cluster of numerous showers just south of Guam. Over the Marianas, shower coverage is isolated for Tinian and Saipan and scattered for Guam and Rota. The buoys reveal combined seas of 7 to 9 feet, composed of a fairly large east swell, a smaller north swell, and wind waves.

Satellite image and accompanying information are provided by the National Weather Service. For an updated weather forecast, visit the National Weather Service Guam homepage: <https://www.weather.gov/gum/>

MICRONESIA			▲▼°F
Guam and Rota	Mostly Cloudy	88° / 79°	
Palau	Partly Cloudy	85° / 78°	
Yap	Partly Cloudy	86° / 79°	
Chuuk	Partly Cloudy	86° / 80°	
Pohnpei	Partly Cloudy	85° / 78°	
Kosrae	Partly Cloudy	85° / 78°	
Majuro	Thunderstorms	85° / 80°	

DAY	SUNRISE	SUNSET
Today	6:41 AM	5:55 PM
Friday	6:41 AM	5:55 PM
Saturday	6:42 AM	5:56 PM
Sunday	6:42 AM	5:56 PM
Monday	6:42 AM	5:57 PM

DAY	MOONRISE	MOONSET	MOONRISE
Today	-	7:36 AM	6:58 PM
Friday	-	8:26 AM	7:53 PM
Saturday	-	9:10 AM	8:45 PM
Sunday	-	9:50 AM	9:35 PM
Monday	-	10:27 AM	10:22 PM

NEWS DESK For news tips, corrections and requests for news coverage, call (670) 235-NEWS (6397), 235-2440, fax 235.3740. E-mail: editor@saipantribune.com. Website:www.saipantribune.com.

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FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF DECEMBER 20, 2023							
DEPARTURES				ARRIVALS			
SAIPAN-GUAM (GUM)				GUAM (GUM)-SAIPAN			
UA076	9:50AM	10:35AM	Daily	UA174	8:00AM	8:45AM	Daily
SAIPAN- NARITA (NRT)				NARITA (NRT)-SAIPAN			
UA824	7:05AM	9:45AM	1, 3, 5	UA825	9:25PM	2:00AM+1	2, 4, 7
GUAM-MANILA (MNL)				MANILA (MNL)-GUAM			
PR 111	5:55AM	7:55AM	Daily	UA189	00:40AM	6:30AM	3, 6
UA193	7:50PM	11:50PM	2, 5 via Palau	PR110	10:05PM	3:55AM+1	Daily
UA183	7:55PM	9:50PM	Daily	UA192	10:40PM	6:30AM+1	2, 5 via Palau
				UA184	10:55PM	4:45AM+1	1, 3, 4, 6, 7
SAIPAN-MANILA (MNL)				MANILA (MNL)-SAIPAN			
7C3403/2305	4:40AM	10:20PM	Daily	UA189/174	00:40AM	8:45AM+1	3, 6 via Guam
UA076/183	9:50AM	9:50PM	Daily via Guam	UA192/174	10:40PM	8:45AM+1	2, 5 via Palau, Guam
UA076/193	9:50AM	11:50PM	2, 5 via Guam, Palau	UA184/174	10:55PM	8:45AM+1	1, 3, 4, 6, 7 via Guam
				7C2306/3406	11:15PM	3:30PM+1	Daily
SAIPAN-INCHEON (ICN)				INCHEON (ICN)-SAIPAN			
TW308	2:15AM	6:10AM	Daily	7C3406	10:10AM	3:30PM	Daily
7C3403	4:40AM	8:35AM	Daily	TW307	7:45PM	1:15AM+1	Daily
7C3405	4:35PM	8:25PM	Daily	7C3404	10:15PM	3:35AM+1	Daily
OZ626	3:10AM	6:55AM	4, 7	OZ625	8:20PM	1:40AM+1	3, 6
LEGEND: Days: Monday (1), Tuesday (2), Wednesday (3), Thursday (4), Friday (5), Saturday (6) and Sunday (7); UA United Airlines; PR, Philippine Airlines; TW, T'Way Air; OZ, Asiana Airlines; 7C, Jeju Air; BX, Air Busan • ETD: Estimated Time of Departure; ETA: Estimated Time of Arrival. <i>(The Saipan Tribune is not responsible for any changes in the schedule.)</i>							

STAR MARIANAS AIR, INC.					
FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF OCTOBER 30, 2023					
SAIPAN TO ROTA					
FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
1301	SAIPAN	ROTA	08:30	09:00	Oct 21-31, 2023
1302	SAIPAN	ROTA	10:30	11:00	Daily
1303	SAIPAN	ROTA	15:30	16:00	Daily
ROTA TO SAIPAN					
FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
3101	ROTA	SAIPAN	9:30	10:00	Oct 21-31, 2023
3102	ROTA	SAIPAN	11:30	12:00	Saturday & Sunday
3103	ROTA	SAIPAN	13:30	14:00	Monday To Friday
3104	ROTA	SAIPAN	16:30	17:00	Daily
ROTA TO GUAM					
FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
3401	ROTA	GUAM	11:30	12:00	Monday To Friday
GUAM TO ROTA					
FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
4301	GUAM	ROTA	12:30	13:00	Monday To Friday
SAIPAN TO TINIAN					
FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
1201	SAIPAN	TINIAN	7:30	7:45	Daily
1202	SAIPAN	TINIAN	8:00	8:15	Daily
1203	SAIPAN	TINIAN	9:00	9:15	Daily
1204	SAIPAN	TINIAN	10:00	10:15	Daily
1206	SAIPAN	TINIAN	15:00	15:15	Daily
1207	SAIPAN	TINIAN	16:00	16:15	Daily
1208	SAIPAN	TINIAN	17:00	17:15	Daily
TINIAN TO SAIPAN					
FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
2101	TINIAN	SAIPAN	8:00	8:15	Daily
2102	TINIAN	SAIPAN	8:30	8:45	Daily
2103	TINIAN	SAIPAN	9:30	9:45	Daily
2104	TINIAN	SAIPAN	10:30	10:45	Daily
2106	TINIAN	SAIPAN	15:30	15:45	Daily
2107	TINIAN	SAIPAN	16:30	16:45	Daily
2108	TINIAN	SAIPAN	17:30	17:45	Daily

TIDES: SAIPAN HARBOR TODAY			FEET
2:28 AM	Low Tide	-0.66	
9:50 AM	High Tide	1.68	
3:07 PM	Low Tide	1.13	
7:27 PM	High Tide	1.62	

Business

New Year's countdown at Hyatt Regency Saipan

MARK RABAGO

On Sunday, Dec. 31, 2023, the last day of the year, all roads lead to Skipper's Beach Bar. Doors open at 4:30pm for a "2023 Sunset Bubble Party" until 8:30pm.

Experience the last sunset of the year with rounds of sparkling wine made possible by "Buy 2 and get 1 Free Jean Louis Blanc de Blanc" promotion for only \$72. Partner it with Skipper's Beach Bar's new snack menu that includes Caesar wrap, fish and beef tacos, quesadilla, and French fries. A great deal as you watch the last captivating sunset of 2023.

Switch gears as the clock strikes 10:30pm for the "2024 Gatsby Party at the Beach Countdown" with lots of dancing, twirling, and singing courtesy of Groove Theory band and raffle draws in between. Wear your Gatsby-themed attire



Nearly 300 guests trooped to Skipper's Bar for Hyatt Regency Saipan's New Year's countdown party to welcome 2023 last Dec. 31, 2022.

and get the chance to win a one night stay oceanview room.

For only \$220, avail of a VIP table that can sit six people, inclusive of two bottles of Moët & Chandon champagne, four canned beers, one bottle of orange juice, complimentary dry snack, and six Lucky Draw tickets. For Club at the Hyatt members, six additional lucky draw tickets will be given per table.

VIP table reservation with pre-payment is required on or before Dec. 20, 2023, to secure a slot in the special year-end party.

Public Bar offers \$5 cash bar for shots and canned beer or avail of a Beer Bucket for only \$25 that includes six cans of beer with a complimentary dry snack. Also available, "Buy 2 and get 1 Free Jean Louis Blanc de Blanc" promotion for only \$72.

Get a raffle ticket for only \$5 and get the chance to win Hyatt dining and staycation

prizes with total value of \$2,000 that includes a one-night stay at the Executive Suite and Breakfast Buffet for two at Kili Café & Terrace and complimentary Club at the Hyatt membership for 2024.

Experience a world of flavors and friendly atmosphere at Giovanni's and Kili Café & Terrace. Enjoy New Year's Eve dinner on Sunday, Dec. 31, 2023 from 6pm to 9pm \$80/adult and \$40/child; \$70/Club at the Hyatt member and \$30/child. Spend the first day of the year at Hyatt New Year's Day Brunch, \$70/adult and \$35 child; \$60/Club at the Hyatt member and \$30/child. Both dining experiences come with free flow beverage package including sparkling wine and beer.

For more information and reservations, visit saipan.regency.hyatt.com and click 'Dining page' or call (670) 234-1234. (Hyatt)

'Tis the season for giving: A guide for how to give, even a little

By **THALIA BEATY**
ASSOCIATED PRESS

Christmas is over, but giving season for nonprofits is just starting to peak.

The end of the calendar year is when nonprofits make appeals far and wide to attract donors—in part because of holiday traditions or, for some, tax advantages. Nonprofits get about 30% of their annual donations in December—including 10% in the final three days of the year—according to marketing agency Nonprofits Source.

"This is one of the busiest times of the year for us as we assist donors with their year-end giving," said Erin Musgrave, a spokesperson for the Silicon Valley Community Foundation.

Many potential donors don't realize how much nonprofits value even small gifts, especially local organizations that meet community needs. And nonprofits and industry groups warn that donations are down this year, so gifts right now could help them a lot.

Only 11% of Americans itemize their taxes, which allows them to claim significant tax deductions for charitable donations. That means most Americans don't give in December for tax reasons.

"They're thinking about the organization in their community that's having an impact and digging deep and giving," said Chuck Collins, director of the Program on Inequality and the Common Good at the Institute for Policy Studies.

As you watch commercial appeals and sort through donation requests, here are some things to consider:

WHERE SHOULD I

DONATE?

Experienced donors often have a short list of criteria they use to help select nonprofits to support. It could be organizations that serve the area where they live or specific causes or issues with which they have a personal connection.

A question to ask yourself is: "What are the issues or communities that are important to me and where do I want to make a difference?"

A great way to find out about organizations in your area is to ask your friends, coworkers and neighbors. They may have interacted directly with a nonprofit that supports after-school programs, sends companions to elderly residents, advocates around traffic safety or supports local artists. For any topic that is important to you, an organization in your area is likely working on it.

Another potential consideration is check if your employer will match donations to the nonprofit you want to support. If so, your donation could go even further.

If you feel burdened by all the urgent appeals everywhere from the checkout line to the mail or online, one tactic is to make a budget and set aside time to give to organizations important to you. Be realistic, make a plan and then, set aside the guilt.

DO I HAVE TO GIVE NOW? I HAVE LOTS OF EXPENSES

No, simply put.

First, there's no obligation to give to nonprofits. Many people make a difference in their communities — donating blood, volunteering

with their fire department, caring for neighbors and myriad other ways.

Second, many nonprofits actually prefer for donors to set up automatic monthly donations, even in very small amounts, rather than giving a lump sum at the end of the year. The automatic donation from your bank account or credit card means they can plan for how to spend those funds in advance, which often helps them save money and resources.

HOW DO I EVEN KNOW MY MONEY IS MAKING A DIFFERENCE?

Some donors say they want their dollars to go directly to the nonprofit's work and not to pay for rent or salaries. This perennial view of wasteful "overhead" spending has some drawbacks, though to be clear, donors have good reason to assess the organizations they support carefully.

But a useful data point comes from the nonprofit ratings agencies themselves. Starting ten years ago, the agencies like BBB Wise Giving Alliance and GuideStar, now part of Candid, teamed up to challenge the idea that the best way to measure the value of a nonprofit was the portion of its funds spent on administrative costs and fundraising.

Michael Thatcher, the president and CEO of Charity Navigator, which overhauled its rating methodology in September, advises that donors consider the organization's impact and whether it's achieving its mission.

"What does the money do? Not where was the money spent?" he told The Associated

Press earlier this year.

WHAT IF I DON'T HAVE A LOT TO GIVE?

People who study philanthropy and advise donors like Vanessa Lee, a program officer who coordinates giving circles at the Chicago Foundation for Women, emphasize that giving back is not the purview of the ultrawealthy.

"It's not like you have to have millions of dollars to be a philanthropist," said Lee. "You can do this at \$10 a month."

Additionally, donations from low- and middle-income people, who give smaller amounts, usually go directly to nonprofit organizations, in contrast to many of the wealthiest donors, Collins of the Institute for Policy Studies said. His organization has researched the giving behaviors of billionaires and found that a growing portion of the overall dollars donated each year goes to donor-advised funds and foundations, not directly to nonprofits.

In one recent example, the CEO of Dell Technologies, Michael Dell, donated stocks valued at \$1.7 billion in October and December to the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation and to donor-advised funds for future charitable donations. Private foundations are obligated to grant out at least 5% of their assets each year but there is no minimum granting requirement for DAFs.

"The very wealthy are giving it to intermediaries they control and parking the money indefinitely," Collins said. "So there's a more of a tax advantage goal, whereas most people are giving, regardless of the tax consequence."

US holiday spending is up

NEW YORK (AP)—Holiday sales rose this year and spending remained resilient during the shopping season even with Americans wrestling with higher prices in some areas and other financial worries, according to the latest measure.

Holiday sales from the beginning of November through Christmas Eve climbed 3.1%, a slower pace than the 7.6% increase from a year earlier, according to Mastercard SpendingPulse, which tracks all kinds of payments including cash and debit cards.

This year's sales are more in line with what is typical during the holiday season, however, after a surge in spending last year during the same period.

"This holiday season, the consumer showed up, spending in a deliberate manner" said Michelle Meyer, Chief Economist, Mastercard Economics Institute. "The economic backdrop remains favorable with healthy job creation and easing inflation pressures, empowering consumers to seek the goods and experiences they value most."

The number of people seeking unemployment benefits has remained very low by historical standards and employers are still having a hard

time finding enough workers.

Still, sales growth was a bit lower than the 3.7% increase Mastercard SpendingPulse had projected in September. The data released Tuesday excludes the automotive industry and is not adjusted for inflation.

Clothing sales rose 2.4%, though jewelry sales fell 2% and electronics dipped roughly 0.4%. Online sales jumped 6.3 % from a year ago and in-person spending rose a modest 2.2%.

Consumer spending accounts for nearly 70% of U.S. economic activity and economists carefully monitor how Americans spend, particularly during the holidays, to gauge how they're feeling financially.

There had been rising concern leading up to the holiday about the willingness of Americans to spend because of elevated prices for daily necessities at a time that savings have fallen and credit card delinquencies have ticked higher. In response, retailers pushed discounts on holiday merchandise earlier in October compared with a year ago. They also took a cautious approach on how much inventory to order after getting stung with overstocked warehouses last year.

Nation

Migrant caravan slogs on through southern Mexico

» With no expectations from a US-Mexico meeting

HUIXTLA, Mexico (AP)—Under a beating sun, thousands of migrants in a caravan continued to trudge through southern Mexico on Tuesday, with some saying they expect nothing good from an upcoming meeting this week between American and Mexican officials about the migrant surge at the U.S. border.

The migrants passed by Mexico's main inland immigration inspection point outside the town of Huixtla, in southern Chiapas state. National Guard officers there made no attempt to stop the estimated 6,000 members of the caravan.

The migrants were trying to make it to the next town, Villa Comaltitlan, about 11 miles (17 kilometers) northwest of Huixtla. In the past, Mexico has let migrants go through, trusting that they would tire themselves out walking along the highway. No migrant caravan has ever walked the 1,000 miles (1,600 kilometers) to the U.S. border.

U.S. officials are expected to press Mexico to stop more migrants at a meeting scheduled for Wednesday.

The meeting "will be between fools and fools, who want to use women and children as trading pieces," said migrant activist Luis García Villagrán, one of the organizers of the caravan. "We are not trading pieces



Migrants walk along a highway in Huixtla, Mexico, Monday, Dec. 25, 2023. A caravan of migrants set out north through southern Mexico just days before U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrives in Mexico City to discuss new agreements to control the surge of migrants seeking entry into the United States.

for any politician."

"What Mexico wants is the money, the money to detain and deport migrants," Villagrán said.

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador confirmed last week that U.S. officials want Mexico to do more to block migrants at its southern border with Guatemala, or make it more difficult to move across Mexico by train or in trucks or buses—a policy known as "contention."

But the president said that in exchange, he wants the United States to send more development aid to migrants' home countries, and to reduce or elim-

inate sanctions against Cuba and Venezuela, noting "that is what we are going to discuss, it is not just contention."

Some on the caravan, like Norbey Díaz Rios, a migrant from Colombia, said turning back was not an option. Díaz Rios, 46, said he left his home because of threats from criminal gangs, and plans to ask for asylum in the U.S.

"You know that you are walking for a purpose, with a goal in mind, but it is unsure if you are going to make it, or what obstacles you will find along the way," said Díaz Rios. "I can't return to Colombia."

"They should give me a

chance to remain in a country where I can get papers and work and provide for my family," he added.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas and White House homeland security adviser Liz Sherwood-Randall will travel to Mexico City for the talks.

This month, as many as 10,000 migrants were arrested daily at the southwest U.S. border.

The Mexican government felt pressure to address that problem, after U.S. officials briefly closed two vital Texas railway border crossings, claim-

ing they were overwhelmed by processing migrants.

That put a chokehold on freight moving from Mexico to the U.S., as well as grain needed to feed Mexican livestock moving south. The rail crossings have since been reopened, but the mes-

sage appeared clear.

The caravan started out on Christmas Eve from the city of Tapachula, near the border with Guatemala, and migrants spent Christmas night sleeping on scraps of cardboard or plastic stretched out under awnings, in tents, or on the bare ground.

The migrants included single adults but also entire families, all eager to reach the U.S. border, angry and frustrated at having to wait weeks or months in the nearby city of Tapachula for documents that might allow them to continue their journey.

Mexico says it detected 680,000 migrants moving through the country in the first 11 months of 2023.

In May, Mexico agreed to take in migrants from countries such as Venezuela, Nicaragua and Cuba who had been turned away by the U.S. for not following rules that provided new legal pathways to asylum and other forms of migration.

But that deal, aimed at curbing a post-pandemic jump in migration, appears to be insufficient as numbers rise once again, disrupting bilateral trade and stoking anti-migrant sentiment.

Ice storms and blizzards pummel central US a day after Christmas

MINNEAPOLIS (AP)—From an ice storm in North Dakota that sealed windows shut to blizzard conditions in Colorado causing hundreds of airport delays and cancellations, a winter storm pummeled much of the central United States on Tuesday, the day after Christmas.

"The heavy snow conditions in the Plains should be slowly alleviating today, but it'll be very slow," said Weather Prediction Center forecaster David Roth. "Even when the snow ends, the high winds should keep visibility near zero—whiteout conditions—for a decent part of today."

Laura Schmidt-Dockter, a resident of Bismarck, North Dakota, wore ice spikes on her shoes as she walked outside to the trash can. Her driveway was sheer ice, she said. A neighbor took to the street on ice skates.

"It's actually not bad!" the neighbor quipped about the quality of the ice, skating by Schmidt-Dockter in a video she posted to social media.

At Denver International Airport there were over 530 flight delays and 23 cancellations as of Tuesday afternoon, according to tracking website FlightAware. Blizzard conditions on

Colorado's plains closed Interstate 70 eastbound from the outer edge of the Denver area to Kansas. Travelers were also unable to head westbound into Colorado from Kansas on the highway because of the threat posed by high winds.

According to the National Weather Service, it's considered a blizzard when winds exceed 35 miles per hour (56 kilometers per hour) for three hours or more, with considerable blowing snow and visibility down to less than a quarter-mile (0.4 kilometers).

Blizzard warnings were in effect mid-Tuesday for western portions of South Dakota, Nebraska and Kansas, along with eastern portions of Colorado and Wyoming. Ice storm warnings and winter weather advisories remained in place in South Dakota, North Dakota and northwestern Minnesota.

On Christmas Day, one person was killed and three others were injured in Kansas, when the driver of a pickup truck lost control on snow and ice and collided head-on with a sport utility vehicle 5 miles (8 kilometers) west of Larned, according to the State Patrol. The woman killed in the crash was identified as Evelyn Reece, 86, of Wichita.



ACROSS THE NATION

Rep. Greene targeted by failed Christmas swatting attempt

Republican U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene was the target of a swatting attempt at her Georgia residence on Christmas morning, the congresswoman and local police said, marking the latest instance of someone calling in a fake emergency to draw armed officers or SWAT teams to her home. The Rome Police Department quickly verified that the call was a hoax and did not send officers to the house, department spokesperson Kelly Madden said. "I was just swatted. This is like the 8th time. On Christmas with my family here. My local police are the GREATEST and shouldn't have to deal with this," Greene wrote in a post on X, formerly Twitter. A man in New York called the Georgia suicide hotline just before 11 a.m. Monday, claiming that he had shot his girlfriend at Greene's home and was going to kill himself next, Madden said. The call was

quickly transferred to police when suicide hotline responders recognized the Georgia congresswoman's address. The department said it contacted Greene's private security detail to confirm she was safe and that there was no emergency at her residence. The call was then determined to be a swatting attempt so the police response was canceled en route, Madden explained. (AP)

6-year-old boy traveling to visit grandma for Christmas put on wrong Spirit flight

FORT MYERS, Fla. (AP)—A 6-year-old boy who left on a flight for the Christmas holiday to visit his grandmother in southwest Florida instead was put on the wrong plane and ended up 160 miles away in Orlando, Florida. When the grandmother, Maria Ramos, showed up on Thursday at Southwest Florida International Airport in Fort Myers to greet her grandson who was flying for the first

time from Philadelphia, she was told he wasn't on the Spirit Airlines flight. "I ran inside the plane to the flight attendant and I asked her, 'Where's my grandson?' He was handed over to you at Philadelphia?" She said, "No, I had no kids with me," Ramos told WINK News. She then got a call from her grandson from the airport in Orlando, telling her that he had landed. In a statement, Spirit Airlines said the boy was under the care and supervision of an airlines employee the entire time, even though he was incorrectly boarded on a flight to Orlando. Once the mistake was discovered, the airlines let the family know, the statement said.

Missing pregnant Texas teen and her boyfriend found dead in a car in San Antonio

SAN ANTONIO, Texas (AP)—A missing pregnant Texas teenager and her boyfriend were found dead in a parked car Tuesday in San Antonio and

police said they may have been there for days. Savannah Nicole Soto, 18, and Matthew Guerra, 22, were reported missing by police in Leon Valley, a few miles northwest of San Antonio suburb. Two bodies were found in a Kia Optima matching the description of one belonging to the boyfriend and they may have been there for three or four days, Police Chief William P. McManus said at a news conference. He didn't identify the bodies pending confirmation by the medical examiner but said they were believed to be those of the missing couple. McManus didn't provide other details and said he didn't know whether a weapon had been found in the car. "What we're looking at right now is a very, very perplexing crime scene," the chief said. "Detectives right now are looking at this as a possible murder but we don't know for sure," he said. "Because of the complexity, the complex crime scene, we can't say for sure what we have."

Asia

Nokor's Kim boasts of '23 feats

SEOUL, South Korea (AP)—North Korean leader Kim Jong Un praised what he called achievements and victories that strengthened national power and boosted the country's prestige this year, as he opened a key political meeting to set new policy goals for 2024, state media reported Wednesday.

Experts said that during this week's year-end plenary meeting of the ruling Workers' Party, North Korea would likely hype its progress in arms development because the country lacks economic achievements amid persistent international sanctions and pandemic-related economic hardships.

In his opening-day speech at the meeting that began Tuesday, Kim defined 2023 "as a year of great turn and great change both in name and reality, in which (North Korea) left a great trace in the glorious course of development in the efforts to improve the national power and enhance the prestige of the country," according to the official Korean Central News Agency.

KCNA said North Korea achieved a rapid advancement in its defense capabilities this year in the wake of the launch of its first military spy satellite in November and the introduction of other sophisticated weapons.

KCNA said North Korea also reported a rare good harvest this year as the country finished building new irrigation systems ahead of schedule and met major agricultural state objectives. It said that modern streets, new houses and other buildings were built in Pyongyang and elsewhere across the country.

According to a recent assessment by South Korea's state-run Rural Development Administration, North Korea's grain production this year was estimated at 4.8 million tons, a 6.9% increase from last year's 4.5 million tons, thanks to favorable weather conditions. But the 4.8 million tons are still short by about 0.7 million tons of sufficient annual levels, as experts say North Korea needs about 5.5 million tons of grain to feed its 25 million people each year.

The Workers' Party meeting, expected to last several days, will review state projects from this year and establish new objectives for next year. In recent years, North Korea has published the results of its meeting, including Kim's closing speech, in state media on Jan. 1, allowing him to skip his New Year's Day address.

The meeting comes after North Korea launched its most advanced intercontinental bal-

listic missile, the solid-fueled Hwasong-18, which is designed to strike the mainland U.S., into the sea last week. North Korea said the Hwasong-18 launch, the third of its kind this year, was meant to warn the U.S. and South Korea over their confrontational moves against North Korea.

On Nov. 21, North Korea put its first military spy satellite into orbit, though outside experts question whether it can send militarily useful high-resolution imagery.

The launches of the Hwasong-18 missile and the spy satellite were part of an ongoing run of weapons tests by North Korea since last year. Kim has maintained he was forced to expand his nuclear arsenal to cope with increasing hostilities from the U.S. and its allies toward the North, but foreign experts say he eventually hopes to use an enlarged arsenal to win greater outside concessions when diplomacy resumes.

Last Thursday, South Korean Defense Minister Shin Wonsik told lawmakers that North Korea appeared to be speeding up its weapons testing activities to highlight its achievements in defense sectors because it lacked major progress in the economy and public livelihoods.

edies. "It has been a very tragic 24 hours due to the weather," Carroll told reporters.

Death toll rises to 18 in furnace explosion at Chinese-owned nickel plant in Indonesia

PALU, Indonesia (AP)—The death toll following the explosion of a smelting furnace at a Chinese-owned nickel plant on Indonesia's Sulawesi island rose to 18 on Tuesday, as police ordered the plant to stop operations until an investigation is completed. The blast, which occurred on Sunday, was the latest in a series of fatalities at nickel smelting plants in Indonesia that are part of China's ambitious transnational development program known as the Belt and Road Initiative. Nickel is a key component in global battery production for electric vehicles. Four Chinese and nine Indonesian workers died instantly on Sunday when the furnace exploded while they were repairing it, Central Sulawesi police chief Agus Nugroho said. Three more victims died a day later while being treated at a local hospital. Two more workers died on Tuesday while hospitalized, bringing the total number of fatalities to 18, including eight workers from China, said Deddy Kur-

niawan, a spokesperson for PT Indonesia Morowali Industrial Park, known as PT IMIP, the parent company of PT Indonesia Tsingshan Stainless Steel, where the explosion occurred. The plant is in the Bahodopi neighborhood of Morowali regency. "We have ordered PT Indonesia Tsingshan Stainless Steel to stop its operation until our entire investigation is completed," said Nugroho, the police chief, adding that authorities had set up a team to determine whether negligence by the company led to the deaths. The blast was so powerful that it demolished the furnace and damaged parts of the side walls of the building, Nugroho said.

The head of central Sulawesi's manpower and transmigration office, Arnold Firdaus, said that joint investigation team is made up of 18 members, and it includes officials from the central government in Jakarta and a working group from the Chinese Embassy. PT IMIP said in a statement on Sunday that the furnace was under maintenance and not operating at the time of the explosion. However, "residual slag in the furnace" came into contact "with flammable items," causing the furnace walls to collapse and the remaining steel slag to flow out.

World

Israel: Gaza ground offensive expanded into refugee camps



Medics unload the bodies of Palestinians killed in fighting with Israel and turned over by the Israeli military during a mass funeral in Rafah, Gaza Strip, Tuesday, Dec. 26, 2023

RAFAH, Gaza Strip (AP)—Israeli forces on Tuesday expanded their ground offensive into urban refugee camps in central Gaza after bombarding the crowded Palestinian communities and ordering residents to evacuate. Gaza's main telecom provider announced another "complete interruption" of services in the besieged territory.

The military's announcement of the new battle zone threatens further destruction in a war that Israel says will last for "many months" as it vows to crush the ruling Hamas militant group after its Oct. 7 attack. Israeli forces have been engaged in heavy urban fighting in northern Gaza and the southern city of Khan Younis, driving Palestinians into ever-smaller areas in search of refuge.

The U.S. said Israel's minister for strategic affairs, Ron Dermer, was meeting with Secretary of State Antony Blinken and national secu-

rity adviser Jake Sullivan to discuss topics including transitioning to a different phase of the war to maximize focus on high-value Hamas targets, improving the humanitarian situation, and planning for governance and security in Gaza after the war.

Despite U.S. calls for Israel to curb civilian casualties and international pressure for a cease-fire, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the military was deepening the fighting.

"We say to the Hamas terrorists: We see you and we will get to you," Netanyahu said.

Israel's offensive is one of the most devastating military campaigns in recent history. More than 20,900 Palestinians, two-thirds women and children, have been killed, according to the Health Ministry in Gaza, whose count doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants. The agency said 240 people were

killed over the past 24 hours.

The U.N. human rights office said the continued bombardment of middle Gaza had claimed more than 100 Palestinian lives since Christmas Eve. The office noted that Israel had ordered some residents to move there.

Israel said it would no longer grant automatic visas to U.N. employees and accused the world body of being "complicit partners" in Hamas' tactics. Government spokesman Eylon Levy said Israel would consider visa requests case by case. That could further limit aid efforts in Gaza.

Residents of central Gaza described shelling and airstrikes shaking the Nuseirat, Maghazi and Bureij camps. The built-up towns hold Palestinians driven from their homes in what is now Israel during the 1948 war, along with their descendants.

"The bombing was very intense," Radwan Abu Sheitta said by phone from Bureij.

Ukraine damages Russian landing ship in Black Sea after battlefield disappointments

KYIV, Ukraine (AP)—Ukrainian warplanes damaged a Russian ship moored in the Black Sea off Crimea, both countries said Tuesday, bolstering Ukrainian morale after battlefield disappointments and doubts about the future of Western aid.

The planes fired guided missiles at the landing ship Novocherkassk, which is moored at a base in the city of Feodosia, Russia's Defense Ministry said. Video on Russian and Ukrainian social media showed an explosion in the port.

Ukrainian authorities claimed the ship was destroyed. They said it was

likely carrying ammunition and possibly drones.

The 360-foot Novocherkassk can carry 10 tanks and 225 sailors.

"We saw how powerful the blast and detonation were. It's extremely difficult for a ship to survive something like that," Ukrainian air force spokesman Yuriy Ihnat said on U.S.-backed Radio Liberty.

"The Russian fleet has become smaller," Ukrainian air force Cmdr. Mykola Oleschuk said in a mocking message on the social media app Telegram. He urged Russians to leave Crimea "while it's not too late."

Over the last few months, Ukrainian forces have conducted a string of attacks around Crimea, a Black Sea peninsula invaded and illegally annexed by Russia in 2014. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy credits those attacks, mostly with naval drones, with allowing Ukraine to restore navigation in the Black Sea and export of millions of tons of grain.

In September, a Ukrainian attack hit the headquarters of Russia's Black Sea Fleet in the Crimean city of Sevastopol, killing one serviceman. Ukraine launched more missiles against the city the following day.

ASIAN BRIEFS

9 people have died in wild weather in Australian states of Queensland and Victoria, officials say

BRISBANE, Australia (AP)—At least nine people have died in wild weather in the Australian eastern states of Queensland and Victoria, officials said on Wednesday. Three men were killed after a boat with 11 people aboard capsized in rough weather in Moreton Bay off the south Queensland coast on Tuesday, police said. Ambulances took the eight survivors to hospital in stable conditions. A 59-year-old woman was killed by a falling tree at the Queensland city of Gold Coast on Monday night. The body of a 9-year-old girl was found on Tuesday in the neighboring city of Brisbane hours after she disappeared in a flooded stormwater drain. The bodies of a 40-year-old woman and a 46-year-old woman were found in the Mary River in the Queensland town of Gympie. They were among three women swept into the flooded river through a stormwater drain on Tuesday. Another 46-year-old woman managed to save herself. Queensland Police Commissioner Katarina Carroll blamed "extraordinarily difficult weather" for the trag-

Environment

Beijing sees most hours of sub-freezing temperatures since 1951

BEIJING (AP)—Beijing recorded the most hours of sub-freezing temperatures in December in more than seven decades as a cold wave has enveloped northern and central swathes of China, bringing snowstorms and record-breaking temperatures.

A weather observatory in the Chinese capital as of Sunday had recorded more than 300 hours of sub-freez-

ing temperatures since Dec. 11 – the most since records began, in 1951, according to the official newspaper Beijing Daily.

The city saw nine consecutive days with temperatures below minus 10 degrees Celsius (14 degrees Fahrenheit), the paper added.

Parts of northern and central China have shivered under frigid cold snaps this month,

with authorities closing schools and highways several times due to snowstorms.

Temperatures at 78 weather stations across the country hit record lows for the month of December, while average temperatures this month in northern and some central parts of China hit record lows set in 1961, according to the National Meteorological Centre.

King's Christmas message calls for planet's protection

LONDON (AP)—King Charles III reflected his coronation theme of public service Monday in a Christmas message that he connected to the health of the planet and wars that are raging.

In a prerecorded video shot with him standing beside a Christmas tree in Buckingham Palace, the king said Beijing sees most hours of sub-freezing temperatures in December since 1951.

BEIJING (AP) — Beijing recorded the most hours of sub-freezing temperatures in December in more than seven decades as a cold wave has enveloped northern and central swathes of China, bringing snowstorms and record-breaking temperatures.

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ham Palace, the king spoke of the message of Jesus' life in serving those less fortunate as he honored the "selfless army" that forms the "backbone of our society" helping others.

"My heart has been warmed by countless examples of the imaginative ways in which people are caring for one another, going the extra mile to



JONATHAN BRADY

Britain's King Charles III poses for a photo, during the recording of his Christmas message at Buckingham Palace, in London, Saturday, Dec. 7, 2023.

help those around them simply because they know it is the right thing to do," he said.

It was the king's second Christmas speech since he ascended the throne after his mother, Queen Elizabeth II, died in September 2022, but the first since his coronation in May when he was officially crowned in a medieval ceremony rich in pageantry and pomp.

Charles, who has long campaigned for environmental causes and recently told foreign leaders at the COP28 Climate Meeting that achieving climate goals remain "dreadfully far off track," said he was encouraged to see awareness growing of the need to protect the earth.

"To care for this creation is the responsibility owned by people of all faiths and of none," he said. "We care for the earth for the sake of our children's children."

In his own gesture towards sustainability, the evergreen next to him was bedecked in natural decorations made from wood, dried oranges, pinecones and paper. The tree, the first live one at the palace, was to be replanted after the holidays.

As Charles spoke, video showed highlights from his past year, including helping plant a tree during a trip to Kenya—his first state visit as monarch with Queen Camilla to a Commonwealth country.

It also featured footage

from the coronation in which he declared, "I come not to be served but to serve." Another clip showed his eldest son, Prince William, heir to the throne, along with his wife, Kate, the princess of Wales, and their three children carrying out that mission by helping to rebuild a Scout hut during a day of service that followed the coronation.

His estranged son, Prince Harry, who left the ranks of the senior royals when he moved to the U.S. in 2020 with this wife, Meghan, wasn't shown in the video. Harry, who showed up alone at the coronation and was seated in the third row, inflamed tensions with his best-selling memoir, "Spare," published early in the year that accused his brother of beating him up.

At a time of "increasingly tragic conflict around the world," a reference to wars in Ukraine and between Israel and Hamas, Charles invoked the words of Christ to "do unto others as you would have them do to you."

"They remind us to imagine ourselves in the shoes of our neighbors and to seek their good as we would our own," he said. "My heart and my thanks go to all who are serving one another, all who are caring for our common home and all who see and seek the good of others, not least the friend we do not yet know."



ANDY WONG

People try to keep warm their hands by a heater as they wait for their seats outside a restaurant at an outdoor shopping mall in Beijing, Saturday, Dec. 23, 2023.

Extreme heat is new threat to trees, plants in Pacific Northwest

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP)—From June 25 to July 2, 2021, the Pacific Northwest experienced a record-breaking heat wave that sent the normally temperate region into Death Valley-like extremes that took a heavy toll on trees as well as people.

Seattle and Portland, Ore., recorded their hottest-ever temperatures, reaching 108 degrees Fahrenheit (42.2 Celsius) and 116 Fahrenheit (46.6 Celsius), respectively. In British Columbia, the small town of Lytton reached 121 degrees Fahrenheit (49.6 Celsius).

What become known as the "heat dome" is estimated to have killed hundreds of people in Oregon, Washington and British Columbia.

As this human tragedy unfolded, a lesser-known ecological tragedy was happening, one that scientists warn has grim repercussions for the world's plants and the many animal species that depend on them.

In a matter of a few days, the 2021 heat dome turned many of the green leaves and needles on the region's trees to orange, red and brown.

But, as recent research suggests, tree foliage didn't simply dry out in the heat. Instead, it underwent "widespread scorching."

"A lot of this reddening and browning of leaves was just that the leaves cooked. It really wasn't a drought story," said Chris Still, professor at Oregon State University's College of Forestry and a leading researcher on the effects of heat on trees.

Still is part of a growing number of scientists investigating what they say is a new, woefully underestimated threat to the world's plants: climate change-driven extreme heat.

In recent years, scientists in the Pacific Northwest have linked the decline of 10 native tree species to drought.

In many cases, conditions that have brought about the decline are known as "hot droughts."

Driven by above-normal temperatures, hot droughts can be far more damaging to trees than droughts that result simply from a lack of moisture. Hot droughts not only dry out soil; they also dry out the air. This stresses trees, and can cause water-carrying tissues inside them to collapse—a process called "hydraulic failure."

In a paper earlier this year in the journal *Tree Physiology*, Still made the case that damage to the region's trees during the heat dome was triggered primarily by direct damage from heat and solar radiation rather than indirectly by drought caused by the extreme heat.

"I'm not trying to say that drought is not a huge and important factor," said Still. "But I think with events like the 2021 heat wave becoming more common and intense, it's important to look at the response of trees and other plants to these events and not just at drought, which has been the dominant paradigm."

Still's argument includes the observation that "foliage scorch" was primarily found on the southern and western sides of trees and forests — a pattern that follows the track of the sun across the summer sky.

"Basically, it was like a sun-burn across the entire forest. It was quite disturbing," said co-author Daniel DePinte, U.S. Forest Service aerial survey program manager, who observed the phenomenon from an airplane.

Multiple tree species were scorched, DePinte said, noting that the role played by the sun became clear when the same trees were viewed from an orientation not exposed to direct sunlight.

"It almost appeared as if the forest damage disappeared," he said.

The paper was written in response to an earlier study published in the same journal that argued a different position: that the heat dome led to widespread drought stress and hydraulic failure in Pacific Northwest trees. "Overall I agree ... that heat damage played a big role in the damage caused to trees (during) the 2021 PNW heat wave. But in my view, hydraulic failure was as important, if not more," wrote that study's lead author Tamir Klein, professor of plant and environmental sciences at the Weizmann Institute of Science in Rehovot, Israel.

Exactly how hot is too hot for trees and other plants is the research focus of William Hammond, a plant ecophysiology at the University of Florida.

Life & Style

S. Korean actor Lee Sun-kyun of Oscar-winning film 'Parasite' is found dead

SEOUL, South Korea (AP)—Lee Sun-kyun, a popular South Korean actor best known for his role in the Oscar-winning movie "Parasite," was found dead in a car in Seoul on Wednesday, authorities said, after weeks of an intense police investigation into his alleged drug use.

Police and emergency officers initially found Lee in what they believed was an unconscious state in the car parked on a street in northern Seoul. Emergency officers later confirmed he was dead, according to Seoul's Seongbuk police station.

Police had been searching for Lee, 48, after receiving a report that he was missing, Seongbuk police said.

They refused to provide further details including whether they had determined Lee killed himself. But South Korean media outlets including Yonhap news agency said that Lee's family earlier Wednesday reported to police that he left home after writing a message similar to a suicide note.

Lee's body was later transported to a nearby Seoul hospital,



Actor Lee Sun-kyun gets off a car upon his arrival at the Incheon Metropolitan Police in Incheon, South Korea, Saturday, Dec. 23, 2023.

according to Seongbuk police.

Lee appeared in "Parasite," which won Oscars for best picture and three other categories in 2020. The class satire was the first non-English-language film to win best picture in the then-92-year history of the Academy Awards, and was the first South Korean movie ever to win an Oscar. In the film, Lee played the

head of a wealthy family.

In 2021, he won a Screen Actors Guild award for "cast in a motion picture" for his role in the same film. He was nominated for best actor at the International Emmy Awards for his performance in the sci-fi thriller "Dr. Brain" last year, as well.

Even before "Parasite," Lee had been a popular actor in South Korea for a long

time. He rose to stardom for his role in a hit TV drama series, "Coffee Prince (2007)," and gained mainstream popularity with the medical drama "Behind The White Tower (2007)," "Pasta (2010)" and "My Mister (2018)."

Lee had undergone police probes into allegations that he used illegal drugs at the residence of a bar hostess. The

investigation prompted extensive tabloid coverage. Lee insisted he was tricked into tak-

ing the drugs and that he did not know what he was taking, according to Yonhap.

Mariah Carey and Bryan Tanaka split after 7 years together, dancer confirms

By MARIA SHERMAN
AP MUSIC WRITER

Mariah Carey and Bryan Tanaka have split after seven years together, the dancer confirmed Tuesday.

In a statement shared with The Associated Press and published to Tanaka's Instagram, Carey's backup dancer-turned-creative director and partner detailed their breakup.

"With mixed emotions, I share this personal update regarding my amicable separation from Mariah Carey after seven extraordinary years together," he wrote. "Our decision to embark on different paths is mutual, and as we navigate these separate journeys, we do so with profound respect and an overwhelming sense of gratitude for the invaluable time we've shared. The memories we've created and the artistic collaborations are etched in my heart forever."

"I eagerly anticipate continuing my journey, knowing my passion for inspiration,

dance, and the creative arts will resonate in the unfolding chapters," he continued.

Tanaka and Carey first met when Tanaka joined her 2006 The Adventures of Mimi tour as a backup dancer.

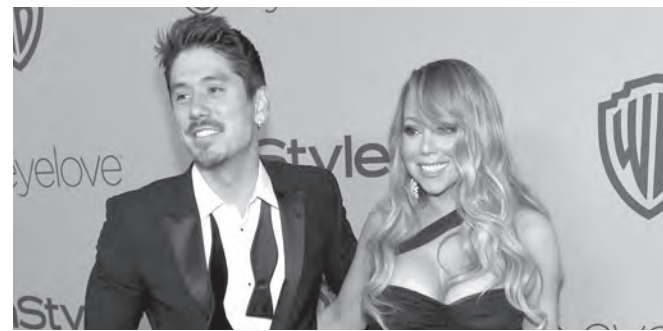
The "All I Want for Christmas is You" singer first confirmed their relationship to the AP in 2017.

"I'm just going to be like 'I really don't talk about my personal life.' Because that's what I used to do and it really worked for a minute, back, a while ago," she said at the time, smiling. "I just don't feel comfortable talking about my personal life. ... Me and my boyfriend don't want to do that."

Rumors of their split began popping up online last month, when fans noticed Tanaka did not join Carey on her Merry Christmas One and All! tour.

Carey has not released a public statement about the breakup.

A representative for Carey did not immediately respond to a request for comment from the AP.



Bryan Tanaka, left, and Mariah Carey arrive at the InStyle and Warner Bros. Golden Globes afterparty at the Beverly Hilton Hotel, Jan. 7, 2018, in Beverly Hills, Calif.

DESPITE SEXUAL MISCONDUCT ALLEGATIONS

56 French stars defend Gerard Depardieu

PARIS (AP)—More than 50 French performers, writers and producers published an essay Tuesday defending film star and national icon Gerard Depardieu amid growing scrutiny of his behavior toward women during his five-decade career. Advocates for sexual abuse victims



Depardieu

expressed dismay at the outpouring of support.

Depardieu was handed preliminary rape and sexual assault charges in 2020 following allegations from actor Charlotte Arnould, and has been accused by more than a dozen other women of harassing, groping or sexually

assaulting them. Depardieu denies wrongdoing, and called the essay "beautiful."

Published Tuesday in the conservative-leaning Le Figaro, it was signed by figures including former first lady and singer Carla Bruni, Depardieu's former partner Carole Bouquet, and actors Pierre Richard, Charlotte Rampling and Victoria Abril. Two doz-

en of the 56 signatories were women. Many are from Depardieu's generation; he is 74.

A recent documentary outlined accusations of sexual misconduct by 16 women against Depardieu, and showed the actor making obscene remarks and gestures during a 2018 trip to North Korea. The France-2 documentary prompted calls by some to stop airing Depardieu's films, which include classics of modern French cinema.

Couple's evolving romance now includes parenthood

DEAR ABBY: I have been seeing the same man for a year and a half. In the beginning, we were, basically, friends with benefits, and we were OK with that. Having both gone through recent breakups or divorce, neither of us wanted anything serious. However, after six months passed, I started falling for him. He always made clear that if he didn't want to go down that road, we would break ties, but the way he acted indicated that maybe one day there would be more.

After eight months, we found out I was two months pregnant. Our baby changed how we both felt about a relationship, but we had things we needed to work through before going down that road. I started therapy—not for him, but because I knew I needed it for myself and, ultimately, our daughter.

We moved in together five months ago. Being together with our daughter has been wonderful. It has made me fall even more in love with him. When I recently told him I want to officially be his lady, he said there are still a few things he wants me to work on—not personality changes, but things like the fact that I'm pushy. I recognize I can be that way, and impatient too, but I feel I wouldn't be so pushy if he gave me more definitive answers. What do you think about this?

READY FOR A REAL RELATIONSHIP

DEAR READY: I applaud you for seeing a therapist to work

through your issues. Now I think the time has come for you and this man to seek couples counseling to determine whether you can iron out your differences. I am not sure whether you two were really on the same page from the beginning of this relationship. Counseling should help you decide how to move forward now that there is a child involved, because you WILL be co-parenting for a long time, regardless of the direction your relationship takes.

■ ■ ■

DEAR ABBY: My husband and I own a parrot we take with us pretty much everywhere. He draws a lot of attention and questions from strangers, which I'm usually happy to answer.

You might be surprised at how many people own or have owned birds, and many of them love to share their stories about how their parrot or parakeet died. (It's often from neglect or improper care or breeding.) These stories are often related in a jovial way, as if they should be amusing or relatable. It really upsets me to have to stand there nodding with fake amusement or sympathy. I am tempted to say something snarky, but I refrain.

I love birds, and I don't like being reminded how disposable they are treated. People don't tend to share graphic stories about dead dogs, cats or children in public. It makes me sad to hear about their dead birds every time I go outside to enrich my own pet's life. What can I say to stop this unwanted

DEAR ABBY

By Abigail Van Buren
UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE

Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Contact Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.



and depressing storytelling before it gets started?

BIRD LOVER IN NORTH CAROLINA

DEAR BIRD LOVER: Try being honest and telling these people that hearing about their experience makes you sad, and why. That should shut 'em up.

■ ■ ■

To receive a collection of Abby's most memorable – and most frequently requested – poems and essays, send your name and mailing address, plus check or money order for \$8 (U.S. funds) to: Dear Abby – Keepers Booklet, P.O. Box 447, Mount Morris, IL 61054-0447. (Shipping and handling are included in the price.)

Pastimes

Calvin and Hobbes

By Bill Waterson



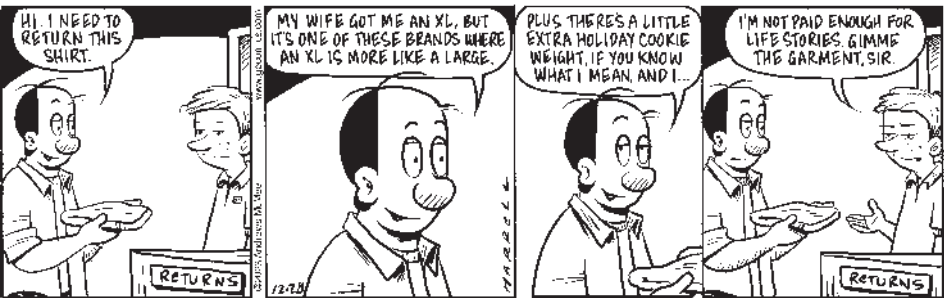
Garfield®

By Jim Davis



Adam@home

By Bryan Basset



The Duplex

By Glenn McCoy



CROSSWORD

By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 L.A. Sparks org.
5 "Unh-unh"
8 Tennis great
12 — Grey tea
13 Vitamin stat
14 Raced
15 With (Fr.)
16 Crew tool
17 Old salts
18 Snappy reply
20 "Phooey!"
22 Many a resort patron
26 Fibber's admission
29 Texter's chuckle
30 — de-France
31 Operates
32 Agent
33 Getting — years
34 PC key
35 Standard
36 Sound of Washington
37 One conducting an interview

DOWN

40 Early TVs
41 Monte-zuma's people
45 Costa —
47 "As I see it," in a text
49 "Garfield" dog
50 Fan fave
51 "Platoon" locale
52 Merlot or Chianti
53 — Bear
54 "Nova" subj.
55 Must have

3 Author Harte
4 Niches
5 Campus org. for future
6 Okla-homa city
7 Convert-ible alter-native
8 Houston player
9 Crossing over
10 "Fight for You" singer
11 Cosmo VIPs
19 "Awe-some, dude!"
21 Have the flu

23 Bygone Olds
24 Writer Wiesel
25 Land-lord's due
26 Bagh-dad's land
27 Hum-dinger
28 School sound system
32 Trail mix bits
33 Thornton Wilder
35 School org.
36 Dis-pensed candy
38 Milan's La —
39 Model Campbell
42 Actress Falco
43 Movie filler
45 Brink
46 Gilbert and Sullivan princess
48 Buddy

Solution time: 24 mins.

Yesterday's answer 12-28

CELEBRITIES BORN ON THIS DAY: John Legend, 45; Denzel Washington, 69; Edgar Winter, 77; Dame Maggie Smith, 89.

Happy Birthday: Pump it up, show enthusiasm and live up to your expectations and promises. Use your resources and adjust to fulfill what's necessary to complete your mission. Don't settle for less; you can reach higher levels. Gauge success by the positive impact you have on the world around you. It's up to you to manufacture opportunities instead of waiting for things to come to you. Make peace and love your goals. Your numbers are 6, 19, 24, 30, 37, 41, 44.

ARIES (March 21-April 19): Travel, communication or a reunion will lead to interesting information that helps you plan your next move. Leave some wiggle room and keep your decisions to yourself until you have all the details. Scrutinize your costs and resources. ★★

TAURUS (April 20-May 20): Research, then adjust to fit your scenario. Don't wait for someone else to make the first move. Be brave, take control and do your part to keep the momentum flowing, and an unexpected opportunity will evolve. Romance is in the stars. ★★★★★

GEMINI (May 21-June 20): A direct approach to situations that arise will help you avoid a misunderstanding. Truth will make a difference to the outcome when dealing with matters that influence a meaningful relationship, position or your reputation. ★★

CANCER (June 21-July 22): Consider alternatives before accepting something that doesn't intrigue you. Don't fear change. Embrace what's new and exciting,

and you'll discover how to incorporate something you enjoy doing into the mix. An event will lead to personal or professional opportunities. Romance is favored. ★★★★★

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22): Get in the game and have some fun. Attend events that offer mental stimulation and fit your budget. Watching how others work in a crowd will provide insight into how you can use your attributes to get others to see things differently. Don't take health risks. ★★★★★

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22): Don't underestimate what others can do. Be prepared to adjust to changes that take place without making a fuss. How you handle matters will determine how others respond. Don't let your emotions or temptation take over. ★★★★★

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22): Find the truth before passing along information. An emotional incident will escalate if you don't set the record straight. Attend a gathering that offers an introduction to something new and exciting. A connection you make will intrigue you. 2 stars

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21): Don't hesitate to change if it gets you closer to your objective. Dig up information that offers insight into where your time and effort will make a difference. Surround yourself with people and possibilities that will stimulate creativity. ★★★★★

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21): Let your imagination lead the way. Follow your heart and give yourself the go-ahead to indulge in creative ventures that motivate you to put your energy to good use and finish what you start. 3 stars

EUGENIA LAST

THE LAST WORD IN ASTROLOGY

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CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19): Look around you and determine how to make your surroundings work with your lifestyle. Having everything conveniently placed will save time, opening opportunities geared toward enjoyable pastimes. Romance, physical fitness and personal growth are on the rise. ★★★★★

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18): Don't fold under pressure. Speak up, follow your heart and reveal the truth. You'll find what you are searching for if you allow yourself the right to do what makes you happy. Refuse to let a bully decide what you do next. Do what's right. ★★★★★

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20): Do something that motivates you to be yourself and to find your bliss. An event or activity that allows you to use the skills that bring you joy will point you in a new direction. Discipline, imagination and skill will pay off. Romance is favored. ★★★★★

Birthday Baby: You are original, questioning and motivated. You are dynamic and reassuring.

★: Avoid conflicts; work behind the scenes. ★★: You can accomplish, but don't rely on others. ★★★: Focus and you'll reach your goals. ★★★★★: Aim high; start new projects. ★★★★★: Nothing can stop you; go for gold.

SUDOKU

Conceptis Sudoku

By Dave Green

				4	7	8	2		3	
2	8	7	3	1	6				4	
1							6	8	7	
				9	6	4				
			8			3				9
6	4							3		
			3				8			
		9					5		6	
4			6	8		3	9	2		

Difficulty: ★★★

12/28

Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Saturday.

Yesterday's Answer

5	7	3	4	8	6	1	2	9
2	9	8	3	7	1	4	6	5
4	6	1	5	2	9	7	8	3
8	1	6	2	3	7	9	5	4
9	2	7	1	5	4	6	3	8
3	5	4	6	9	8	2	1	7
6	8	9	7	1	3	5	4	2
7	4	5	8	6	2	3	9	1
1	3	2	9	4	5	8	7	6

Difficulty: ★★★

WONDERWORD

By DAVID OUELLET

HOW TO PLAY: All the words listed below appear in the puzzle — horizontally, vertically, diagonally and even backward. Find them, circle each letter of the word and strike it off the list. The leftover letters spell the WONDERWORD.

COCKAPOOS Solution: 9 letters

L	D	E	L	D	D	U	C	A	N	I	N	E	G	E
U	E	L	S	W	A	P	Y	C	O	L	L	A	R	A
F	S	I	T	A	O	C	L	E	M	O	H	U	O	T
Y	I	G	N	O	T	D	Y	F	Y	T	C	W	K	
A	G	A	D	A	E	F	N	G	B	A	H	G	T	R
L	N	L	C	Y	P	O	E	R	N	E	G	R	N	A
P	E	L	V	T	M	S	I	E	W	B	I	O	E	B
T	R	A	I	N	I	D	R	N	R	C	E	O	G	A
A	W	Y	R	X	V	F	E	K	M	H	M	I	C	
S	T	O	P	S	E	I	E	S	K	L	A	W	L	K
T	E	L	P	L	D	B	M	O	C	U	R	L	Y	
R	E	R	U	N	N	I	N	G	E	V	O	L	E	A
O	W	Y	P	D	Y	T	U	A	E	B	O	C	T	R
P	S	L	E	E	P	G	O	L	D	E	N	G	N	D
S	C	R	U	F	F	Y	R	R	U	F	S	W	I	M

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Active, Agile, Backyard, Bark, Beauty, Breed, Canine, Chew, Coat, Cocker Spaniel, Collar, Comb, Cuddle, Curly, Dander, Designer, Eat, Energy, Friendly, Furry, Golden, Groom, Grow, Height, Home, Hybrid, Intelligent, Love, Loyal, Mixed, Nature, Paws, Pet, Playful, Poodle, Puppy, Running, Scruffy, Sleep, Soft, Sports, Spots, Sweet, Swim, Train, Tricks, Walk, Wavy
Yesterday's Answer: Galveston
The NEW Treasury 57 can be purchased online at www.WonderWordBooks.com, or call 1-800-642-6480, (in Canada, call 1-855-232-2367).

STUMPED?

For answers to today's crossword, call 1-900-226-5955! 99c per minute, touch-tone/rotary phones. (18+ only.) A King Features service, NYC.

Pistons loses to Nets to set single-season record with 27th straight loss



DETROIT (AP)—The Detroit Pistons set an NBA single-season record with their 27th straight loss Tuesday night, as Cam Johnson scored 24 points and Mikal Bridges added 21 to lead the Brooklyn Nets to a 118-112 victory.

Cade Cunningham scored 41 points but the Pistons (2-28) broke a tie with the 2010-11 Cleveland Cavaliers and 2013-14 Philadelphia 76ers. The 76ers hold the overall mark at 28, a skid that started in the 2014-15 season and carried over into 2015-16.

“A lot of this load is trusted to me, on the court and in the locker room,” Cunningham said. “Every day, I try to lead the squad, and I haven’t been successful at that—2-28. It’s only right that I speak for it and be the face of it.”

Cunningham scored 37 in the second half and shot 15 for 21 from the field, but Bojan Bogdanovic was the only other Pistons player with more than 15. Cunningham’s teammates shot 36.2% (25 for 69), including 28.6% (6 for 21) on 3-pointers.

“You have to be real about where we are,” Pistons coach Monty Williams said. “Nobody wants something like this attached to them, and the bottom line is it is my job. Coaches are graded on their records.”

Nic Claxton and Day’Ron Sharpe each added double-doubles for the Nets, who beat the Pistons for the second straight game.

“I didn’t sleep very well last night, anticipating how tough this game was going to be,” Nets coach Jacque Vaughn said. “Any time you play a team back-to-back like that, it is really tough to (win).”

Dorian Finney-Smith’s 3-pointer capped a 13-0 run that put the Nets up 105-97 with 4:53 to play. Cunningham missed a pair of free throws, but came back with a 3-pointer and a three-point play to pull Detroit within 109-106 with 1:54 left.

After Johnson’s 3-pointer, a pair of layups from Cunningham made it 112-10. Finney-Smith, though, hit a baseline 3 to put the Nets up 115-110 with 38 seconds left.

“We had a little bit of execution and composure down the stretch,” Johnson said. “It didn’t always go our way, but we were able to pull it out.”

Alec Burks missed a 3-pointer, and the Nets clinched the game from the free-throw line as fans chanted “Sell the team! Sell the team!”

Brooklyn took an 11-point lead early in the third quarter, but the Pistons responded with an 11-0 run to tie the game at 71. Cunningham scored 18 of Detroit’s 31 points in the period, keeping Detroit within 88-85



Detroit Pistons guard Cade Cunningham, center, is defended on his shot by Brooklyn Nets forward Dorian Finney-Smith (28) forward Royce O’Neale, right, during the second half of an NBA basketball game, Tuesday, Dec. 26, 2023, in Detroit.

going into the fourth.

The Pistons started the game with a 22-8 run, giving hope to a large crowd, but the Nets outscored them 53-32 in the rest of the first half.

“To have a start like that and then kind of let it go in the second quarter—that’s the quarter that put us in the hole,” Williams said. “I think we had six turnovers in the second quarter. That’s something that has plagued us all year long.”

THUNDER 129, TIMBERWOLVES 106

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP)—Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 34 points, Jalen Williams added 21 and Oklahoma City made 18 shots from 3-point range to beat Minnesota.

Chet Holmgren and Lu Dort each added 20 points for the Thunder, who went 18 for 39 (46.2%) on 3s and forced 24 Minnesota turnovers that led to 23 points. Dort was 5 of 6 from beyond the arc.

Anthony Edwards had 25 points to pace Minnesota. Mike Conley added 17 and Karl-Anthony Towns had 16.

Josh Giddey returned to the starting lineup for the Thunder after missing a game with a left ankle sprain. He finished with 10 points.

MAGIC 127, WIZARDS 119

WASHINGTON (AP)—Franz Wagner had 28 points, nine assists, and eight rebounds, rookie Anthony Black scored a career-high 23 points and Orlando defeated Washington.

Paolo Banchero overcame a slow start to finish with 24 points and eight assists and Jalen Suggs returned from a two-game absence due to a left wrist injury to score 11.

Jordan Poole had 30 points to lead the Wizards, who have lost four of their last five, and Tyus Jones added 22.

Trailing by as many as eight, Washington’s bench came up with 12 points in the first quarter and a 14-4 run tied things at 33 after one.

Daniel Gafford had 13 points and 13 rebounds while Kyle Kuzma had 17 for the Wizards.

TRAIL BLAZERS 130, KINGS 113

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP)—Anfernee Simons scored 29 points to lead Portland Trail over Sacramento.

Duop Reath added a career-high 25 points and grabbed nine rebounds off the bench for the Blazers. Malcolm Brogdon scored 19 points, while Scoot Henderson and Jabari Walker each had 17 off the bench.

Henderson added 11 assists and had only one turnover in one of his strongest games of his pro career.

De’Aaron Fox scored 43 points and Domantas Sabonis had 34 points, but no other Sacramento players scored in double figures.

GRIZZLIES 116, PELICANS 115, OT

NEW ORLEANS (AP)—Ja Morant scored 31 points and Memphis defeated New Orleans in overtime to improve to 4-0 since Morant made his season debut in New Orleans a week earlier.

Desmond Bane scored 27, including a 3 in the final minute of regulation that helped Memphis erase a 15-point, second-half deficit. Jaren Jackson Jr. added 19 points, redeeming his missed free throw at the end of regulation with a pair of baskets late in overtime that gave

the Grizzlies the lead for good.

Zion Williamson had 23 points and 11 rebounds for the Pelicans. Brandon Ingram scored 24 points and blocked four shots. Jonas Valanciunas had 17 points and 13 rebounds, and CJ McCollum added 16 points for New Orleans, which dropped its second straight—both at home.

The overtime came after a wild last few seconds on the game clock that took several minutes to complete because of video reviews of foul calls.

PACERS 123, ROCKETS 117

HOUSTON (AP)—Tyrese Haliburton had 33 points and 10 assists and hit a go-ahead 3-pointer with a minute left to lead Indiana over Houston, snapping a three-game losing streak.

Alperen Sengun led Houston with 30 points and 16 rebounds, and Fred Van-

Vleet added 18 points and nine assists.

Rockets forward Tari Eason tied the game at 33 on the last play of the first quarter by stealing the ball from Andrew Nembhard and finishing with a thunderous breakaway dunk. Eason had 16 points and eight rebounds off the bench for Houston.

There were 15 lead changes and six ties in the game.

BULLS 118, HAWKS 113

CHICAGO (AP)—Andre Drummond had season highs of 24 points and 25 rebounds in his first start of the season, DeMar DeRozan scored 25 points and Chicago cooled off Atlanta’s Trae Young somewhat in beating the Hawks.

Young finished with 21 points and 13 assists after tying Oscar Robertson’s record of seven consecutive games with at least 30 points and 10 assists.

Drummond made 11 of 13 shots and played 39 minutes. Coby White and Ayo Dosunmu each scored 19. White missed all seven 3-pointers and the Bulls were 7 of 25 from beyond the arc.

Bogdan Bogdanovic led Atlanta with 22 points. Dejounte Murray finished with 17 after scoring 20 or more in five straight games, and the Hawks lost their third in a row.

JAZZ 130, SPURS 118

SAN ANTONIO (AP)—Lauri Markkanen had 31 points and 12 rebounds, and Utah overcame a slow start to beat San Antonio, which has lost five straight since snapping a franchise-worst 18-game losing streak.

Jordan Clarkson added 24 points, Collin Sexton had 20 and Walker Kessler scored 11 for Utah.

Keldon Johnson led San Antonio with 26 points, Devin Vassell had 22, Jeremy Sochan added 19 and Victor Wembanyama had 15.

The Jazz have won three in a row and six of eight after starting the season 2-7.

CLIPPERS 113, HORNETS 104

LOS ANGELES (AP)—James Harden scored 20 of his 29 points in the first half and Los Angeles rallied for a victory over Charlotte to end a two-game losing streak.

Paul George scored 25 points and Ivica Zubac added 18 points with 14 rebounds as the Clippers won for the first time in three games since Kawhi Leonard was sidelined with a left hip contusion.

Miles Bridges scored 21 points with 11 rebounds, while Terry Rozier and P.J. Washington added 18 each for the Hornets, who lost their eighth game in a row.

Nick Richards added 13 points and 10 rebounds for Charlotte.

New Orleans Pelicans and Smoothie King renew their arena naming rights agreement

NEW ORLEANS (AP)—The New Orleans Pelicans and Smoothie King have agreed to renew their arena naming rights contract, the club announced Tuesday.

The arena will “retain its distinctive identity as the Smoothie King Center for the foreseeable future,” the Pelicans said in a statement.

Neither the club nor Smoothie King released details on the specific length or value of the agreement. The initial agreement, reached in 2014, ran for 10 years through the current NBA season and reportedly had an estimated value approaching

\$40 million.

The Pelicans’ lease at the 24-year-old arena is due to expire next summer. But the club has said it intends to exercise an option to remain in the Smoothie King Center through at least the end of the current decade while exploring longer-term plans that could include proposals for a new arena or extensive renovations to the current building.

“We are thrilled to extend our relationship with Smoothie King and maintain the iconic Smoothie King Center as the home of the New Orleans Pelicans,” team owner Gayle

Benson said. “Smoothie King’s commitment to wellness and community aligns perfectly with our values, and we look forward to continuing to build on the success we’ve achieved together.”

Smoothie King was founded in New Orleans five decades ago. It moved its headquarters to Dallas after signing the previous 10-year naming rights deal.

“We’re so excited to continue to be a part of the community and have a strong presence there through our stores and our partnership with the Pelicans,” Smoothie King owner Wan Kim said.

Purdy's rare bad game dooms 49ers in showdown vs. Ravens



SANTA CLARA, Calif. (AP)—Brock Purdy's storied ride

from final pick of the 2022 draft to most efficient quarterback in the NFL has featured very few on-field struggles.

That's what made his four-interception performance in one of the most highly anticipated games of the season so glaring. How Purdy bounces back from the 33-19 loss to the Baltimore Ravens on Monday night will go a long way in determining how successful this season will ultimately be for the 49ers.

"I think it's unbelievable how he's played for the past two years," defensive end Nick Bosa said. "Just being a young rookie last year, it seems like he's immortal out there. But no one is immortal. He's responded from not his best performance before and I think he will do that again."

Purdy's night got off to a bad start when he didn't see safety Kyle Hamilton and threw an interception in the end zone on the first drive of the game for San Francisco (11-4).

A deflected pass off a cornerback blitz led to his second turnover and then a questionable decision to throw across his body over the middle on a



San Francisco 49ers quarterback Brock Purdy (13) reacts after throwing an interception during the first half of an NFL football game against the Baltimore Ravens in Santa Clara, Calif., Monday, Dec. 25, 2023.

play that already had a penalty on San Francisco led to the third interception.

He was then hit on a pass that was intercepted on the second drive of the third quarter, essentially sealing San Francisco's fate.

"I just think the fact he's played this long and never had a game like this is pretty unusual," coach Kyle Shanahan said. "I think that's the reality of the

NFL. I'm not saying it's bound to happen, but I wish he didn't have as many picks. But like I said, I think one of them was one he'd really liked to have back. The other three I think were unfortunate."

It was by far the worst game of Purdy's 23 career starts in the regular season and playoffs. He had been on a near record-setting pace this season before the setback against one of the

NFL's top defenses.

But the loss doesn't have to be crushing for San Francisco. The Niners can still clinch the No. 1 seed and a first-round bye with wins over Washington and the Rams the next two weeks.

"It's easy to be riding the high and thinking you're the man when things are going well, winning games and all that kind of stuff, and you don't really see a whole lot of adversity in some games," Purdy said. "This is the reality of the NFL."

WHAT'S WORKING

Christian McCaffrey. While there were plenty of struggles on Monday night, McCaffrey delivered once again. He rushed for 103 yards on 14 carries and added six catches for 28 yards. McCaffrey moved into a tie for the NFL lead with Raheem Mostert with his 21st touchdown and leads the NFL with 1,932 yards from scrimmage. McCaffrey set a fran-

chise record with his eighth straight game with at least 100 yards from scrimmage.

WHAT NEEDS HELP

Penalties. San Francisco was penalized 10 times for 102 yards — their second-most penalty yards in a game this season. Several of those infractions contributed directly to Baltimore scores. Safety Tashaun Gipson was called for a face mask and pass interference on the Ravens' first TD drive, Ambry Thomas got called for holding on a field-goal drive later in the second quarter and punter Mitch Wishnowsky committed a late hit early in the third quarter to lead to a TD drive starting on the San Francisco 44.

STOCK UP

CB Jason Verrett. His play in his first game of the season wasn't great but getting back on the field was the main accomplishment. Verrett hadn't played a game since tearing

his ACL in Week 1 of the 2021 season for San Francisco. He then missed all of last season with an Achilles tendon injury and has managed to play more than one game in a season only once since 2017 because of a long series of injuries. He played just five snaps on Monday and allowed a TD to Nelson Agholor.

STOCK DOWN

Offensive line. The Niners lost starters Trent Williams and Aaron Banks to injuries in the second half and struggled to protect Purdy. San Francisco allowed pressures on 47% of drop-backs for Purdy and Sam Darnold, according to Pro Football Focus. Colton McKivitz allowed nine pressures and Spencer Burford allowed four on 24 pass block snaps after being forced to play tackle for the first time in his career.

INJURIES

Shanahan had no update on the status of three offensive linemen who left the game with injuries: Williams (groin), Banks (toe) and T Jaylon Moore (concussion). ... LB Oren Burks (knee), RB Elijah Mitchell (knee) and TE Ross Dwelley (ankle) are expected to return to practice this week. ... The status of DT Arik Armstead (foot, knee) and WR Jauan Jennings (concussion) remains in doubt this week.

KEY NUMBER

65.2—The big question hanging over Purdy is his ability to lead a team from behind. Purdy has struggled doing that season and that happened again on Monday night. Purdy is 37 for 63 for 554 yards, two TDs, five interceptions and a 65.2 passer rating when trailing in the second half.

NEXT STEPS

San Francisco visits Washington on Sunday.

Texans claim safety Kareem Jackson off waivers from Broncos, who had hoped to re-sign him

By **ARNIE STAPLETON**
AP PRO FOOTBALL WRITER

Kareem Jackson is returning to his roots after the Houston Texans claimed the hard-hitting safety off waivers from the Denver Broncos on Tuesday.

The Broncos (7-8) were hoping he'd clear waivers so they could re-sign their locker room leader and tone-setter to the practice squad. That way, they didn't have to expose another player to the waiver wire and risk losing him. Plus, they'd have been able to elevate Jackson to the active roster for games.

Instead, he's back with the Texans (8-7), who drafted him 20th overall out of Alabama in 2010.

"H Town..... I'mmm Baaaack," Jackson said on social media Tuesday.

Jackson played cornerback for nine seasons with Houston before moving to safety when he joined the Broncos in free agency in 2019.

As a converted cornerback, Jackson's 5-foot-10, 183-pound frame puts him on the smaller size for NFL safeties, something he's compensated for with a hard-hitting style that often produces hits that used to be celebrated but are now frowned upon.

He got in trouble in 2023

when he repeatedly ran afoul of the league's rules designed to keep players safe with a series of illegal hits early in the season, three of which put opponents in the concussion protocol. The results included several fines, two ejections and two suspensions totaling six games.

He's forfeited game checks totaling \$839,000 and was fined a total of \$89,670, although the league rescinded his largest fine — \$43,709 for an unflagged hit on Chiefs running back Isiah Pacheco in October.

Jackson signed a one-year, \$2.5 million contract late in free agency last spring and lost his starting job to Caden Sterns in training camp. But he resumed his starting role when Sterns suffered a season-ending leg injury in the Broncos' opener.

After missing seven of Denver's last eight games, he wasn't going to nudge safety PJ Locke from the starting job like he did when he returned from his first suspension, which was cut in half to two games.

His first tackle in his return to action resulted in his second four-game banishment, which the NFL upheld on appeal.

Jackson returned to practice last week but the Broncos kept him on the exempt list. He missed the Broncos' game

against New England on Sunday night and was released on Christmas Day with the understanding he'd return to the Broncos when he cleared waivers.

Instead, the Texans claimed him and placed safety Jimmie Ward on injured reserve.

Although he's only played in one game since Oct. 22, Jackson told The Associated Press last week that he was in great cardiovascular condition, having worked out diligently during his banishment from team headquarters, and he said returning to the field was like getting back on a bicycle.

"You don't forget," Jackson said. "I mean, you haven't rode a bike in how long? I'm sure you can get on one today and ride it from here to the stadium if you have to."

Jackson was granted an audience with Commissioner Roger Goodell during his second suspension as he sought advice on how to quit running afoul of the league's rules designed to keep players safe. He said Goodell said it was his job to keep opponents safe, something he said was near impossible for a safety trying to keep himself healthy and make plays as the last line of defense.

Sources: NFL denies Eagles' appeal of \$100K fine and security chief DiSandro's sideline ban

The NFL has denied the Eagles' appeal of a \$100,000 fine and the league's ban of the team's security chief, Dom DiSandro, from the sideline for the remainder of the regular season, two people familiar with the league's decision told The Associated Press on Friday.

Philadelphia was fined and DiSandro was barred from the sideline for his role in a scuffle with 49ers linebacker Dre Greenlaw. The team has paid the fine, said the people who spoke on condition of anonymity because the matter hasn't been disclosed.

DiSandro has still been permitted to travel and per-

form all other work duties. The AP previously reported his sideline ban on Dec. 16. DiSandro can return to the sideline for the postseason.

DiSandro pulled Greenlaw off Eagles wide receiver DeVonta Smith and shouted at him after a reception in the third quarter of Philadelphia's 42-19 loss to San Francisco on Dec. 3. Greenlaw, who was penalized for unnecessary roughness on the play, popped up and reached over two officials to put his hand in DiSandro's face.

Greenlaw was ejected and later fined \$10,927 by the league for the unnecessary roughness penalty. DiSandro

also was told to leave and walked to the locker room to a rousing ovation from Eagles fans.

The NFL later sent a memo to teams reiterating a policy that states non-player personnel are prohibited from making physical contact, taunting or directing insults to opposing players or officials. The memo also said only game officials or coaches should try to break up altercations. The league said any violations could lead to fines or suspensions.

DiSandro met with NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell while waiting on the appeal process. (AP)

Mets hit with record luxury tax of nearly \$101M for season of 4th-place finish



NEW YORK
(AP)—The

New York Mets must pay a record luxury tax of nearly \$101 million after a fourth-place finish in their division, among an unprecedented eight teams that owe the penalty for the 2023 season.

Owner Steve Cohen's Mets finished with a tax payroll of \$374.7 million, according to figures finalized by Major League Baseball on Thursday and obtained by The Associated Press. That topped the previous high of \$291.1 million by the 2015 Los Angeles Dodgers.

The Mets' tax bill came to \$100,781,932 after they finished fourth in the NL East at 75-87 in the most expensive flop in baseball history. That more than doubled the prior high of \$43.6 million by the 2015 Dodgers.

The Mets saved about \$18 million for this year with their summer selloff that saw them trade Max Scherzer, Justin Verlander, David Robertson and Mark Canha. Their projected tax payroll on June 30 was \$384 million, according to MLB, and that additional \$9.3 million in payroll would have resulted in a tax \$8.4 million higher.

The final amount owed by the Mets would have been slightly more, but they benefited from a tax credit of \$2,126,471 under a provision in the latest collective bargaining agreement for a payroll overcharge involv-



New York Mets owner Steve Cohen looks on before the start of a baseball game between the New York Mets and the Cincinnati Reds, Sunday, Sept. 17, 2023, in New York.

ing three players they traded. New York's two-year tax total is \$131.6 million.

Other teams owing tax money are San Diego (\$39.7 million), the New York Yankees (\$32.4 million), the Dodgers (\$19.4 million), Philadelphia (\$6.98 million), Toronto (\$5.5 million), Atlanta (\$3.2 million) and World Series champion Texas (\$1.8 million). The Blue Jays, Braves and Rangers are paying tax for the first time.

The Yankees and Mets were the only teams to exceed the fourth threshold of \$293 million, added in the 2022 labor contract, an initiative dubbed

the Cohen Tax and aimed at reigning in Cohen.

The previous high for taxpayers was six, in 2016 and last year. This year's tax totaled \$209.8 million, more than double the prior record of \$78.5 million for 2022.

The Los Angeles Angels finished with a tax payroll \$28,654 below the \$233 million tax threshold. The Angels were projected at \$231.15 million on June 30 and got under by allowing pitchers Lucas Giolito, Matt Moore, Dominic Leone and Reynaldo López along with outfielder Hunter Renfroe to be claimed off waivers on Aug. 31.

Texas was projected at \$220.2 million on June 30 before boosting its pitching staff by trading for Scherzer, Aroldis Chapman, Jordan Montgomery and Chris Stratton and also acquiring catcher Austin Hedges. The Rangers' final payroll was \$242.1 million.

Total spending on luxury tax payrolls rose 12.2% to a \$5.79 billion from \$5.16 million last year, the previous high.

The Yankees have been taxed just under \$390 million since the penalties began in 2003, 43% of the \$901 million total, followed by the Dodgers at \$234 million. Fourteen of 30 teams have

owed tax over the two decades.

Tax payrolls are calculated by average annual values, including earned bonuses, for players on 40-man rosters along with just over \$17.1 million per team for benefits and \$1.67 million for each club's share of the \$50 million pool for pre-arbitration players that started in 2022. Deferred salaries and bonus payments are discounted to present-day values.

MLB has not finalized regular payrolls, which are based on 2023 salaries and earned bonus plus prorated shares of signing bonuses.

Because they owe tax for the third straight year, the Padres and Dodgers pay at a 50% rate on the first \$20 million above the \$233 million threshold, a 62% rate on the next \$20 million and a 95% rate on the amount from \$273 million to \$293 million.

The Mets, Yankees and Phillies owe tax for the second year in a row and pay 30% on the first \$20 million over, 42% on the next \$20 million, 75% on the third \$20 million and 90% on the amount over \$293 million.

The first \$3.5 million of tax money is used to fund player benefits and 50% of the remainder will be used to fund player Individual Retirement Accounts. The other 50% of what's left goes to a supplemental commissioner's discretionary fund intended to be given to teams receiving revenue-sharing money that have grown their non-media local revenue over several years.

Next year's initial threshold is \$237 million. If the Mets, Yankees, Dodgers, Padres or Phillies go over, they would pay at the highest tax rate, rising to 110% for the amount over \$297 million.

Saipan Marathon 2024 early bird deadline set on Dec. 31

The Saipan Marathon 2024 early bird registration deadline is Sunday, Dec. 31, 2023.

The marathon will be held on March 9, 2024. Early bird rates are \$90 for the full marathon, \$60 for the half marathon, and \$60 for the 10K and 5K. Fees will increase incrementally on Jan. 1 and Feb. 1, 2024.

To register or for more information visit www.raceroster.com.

A new course highlighting iconic sites from The Marianas' rich history awaits full marathon runners. The road race will traverse sites from the various eras of Marianas history, including pre-history, the Spanish administration, the Japanese administration in the early 1900s, World War II, and modern history as a U.S. Commonwealth.

"Although The Marianas are small in size—Saipan is only 13 miles long—we have a rich and diverse history, and the remnants and influences of that history can still be experienced today. Our full marathon course this year will give runners a chance to see that for themselves," said MVA managing director Christopher A. Concepcion. "We look forward to welcoming all runners to our beautiful shores in March 2024 and to sharing our island history and our way of life."

The start and finish line for all courses of Saipan Marathon will be at American Memorial Park, a U.S. national park honoring those who gave their lives during the Marianas Campaign of World War II. The park includes a visitors' center, several memorials, and WWII artifacts. The marathon start and finish line are at Micro Beach, also known as Ppiyal Ooláang, a site

where traditional indigenous navigators observe the heavens, winds, and ocean at sunset to predict sailing conditions in a tradition of sailing across the

Pacific using indigenous navigational skills based solely on natural phenomena, a practice still seen in The Marianas today.

The full marathon course will pass a hospital and pharmacy from the Japanese period in the first half of the 1900s which now house the Northern Mariana Islands Museum of History & Culture. Also along the way is Sugar King Park honoring "Sugar King" Haruji Matsue who developed a thriving sugar industry in The Marianas during the Japanese administration. The park includes a statue of Matsue, a locomotive engine from the era, and Kattori Shrine, named after the famed Shintō shrine in the city of Katori in Chiba Prefecture, Japan. The full marathon course will also take runners into the lush and quiet roads of Marpi in northern Saipan and pass two significant World War II sites, the Last Command Post and Banzai Cliff.

Cash prizes will be awarded for top finishers and by age division in the marathon. Participants will receive a limited-edition official Saipan Marathon T-shirt, official Saipan Marathon medal, Certificate of Completion and one entry to the awards banquet, also on March 9.

For more information, visit <https://raceroster.com/events/2024/78587/saipan-marathon-2024> or www.mymarianas.com or contact MVA Community Projects coordinator Ed Diaz at (670) 664-3210 or ediaz@mymarianas.com. (MVA)



Verdugo shaves off beard 2 months early to get Yankees feeling after trade

NEW YORK (AP)—Alex Verdugo complied with the New York Yankees' rule against facial hair by a lot more than a whisker. He clipped off his red beard two months before spring training.

"My mom loves it," he said Thursday, showing off his impeccably shaved cheeks during a Zoom news conference. "My mom thinks I look like her little boy again. She says I look like I'm back in high school."

New York acquired the 27-year-old outfielder from the Boston Red Sox on Dec. 5 for right-handers Greg Weissert, Richard Fitts and Nicholas Judge, part of an off-season makeover that included getting slugging All-Star Juan Soto in a trade with San Diego the following day.

Yankees owner George Steinbrenner issued a code in 1976 banning facial hair other than mustaches, lengthy locks that dropped below the collar and long sideburns. Once Verdugo was dealt to New York, he felt razor focused to conform.

"It was kind of bothering me, man. That was the biggest thing going to the Yankees,

you have to be clean shaven," he said. "I haven't been clean shaven since high school and even then, I would have some stuff on my chin, some things like that. It was just kind of eating at me. And I was like, you know what, I don't even know how I look without a beard. I want to cut it up, see how it feels. And then also, I wanted to—since you have to keep up the shaving. I wanted to see like how my skin would react to constantly shaving and keeping it clean."

Verdugo had liked the beard for warmth.

"It feels like a fresh start," he said. "I feel like a kid again."

Speaking from his home in Arizona, Verdugo said he has been working out in a Yankees cap. He wore No. 27 with Boston, a number held by Giancarlo Stanton in New York. Verdugo said he'll wait until he gets a new pendant to reveal his new jersey.

He hit .264 with 13 homers, 54 RBIs and a .745 OPS this year in his fourth season with the Red Sox. A Gold Glove finalist, he had 12 outfield assists and nine defensive runs saved.

New York manager Aaron

Boone thinks the left-handed-hitting Verdugo could benefit from Yankee Stadium's short porch.

"I think there's more in there," Boone said. "I don't necessarily think he's reached his potential. So hopefully this environment for him and obviously entering the last year before free agency, there's a lot carrots out there."

Verdugo bristled when he first learned of the trade.

"I was hot. I was just like, man, they really me sent to rivals, the Yankees?" he said.

Verdugo was benched twice last season by Boston manager Alex Cora: on June 8 for not hustling between first and second on a grounder a night earlier, and on Aug. 5 for arriving late at the ballpark.

"It toughens me up and it makes me realize some things," Verdugo said. "I'm not too sure 100% what it was. It could also be you're struggling on a baseball team. It's just there's a lot of expectations and when you're not really meeting them, you kind of start bumping heads a little bit."

He complimented Boone for defending his players, citing the profane 2019 rant at umpire Brennan Miller in

which the manager praised his team as "savages."

"That's something I want to see out of my head coach, man. I want to see some fire, some fight for the guys," Verdugo said. "I think just instead of airing people out, have their backs."

Verdugo said veterans reached out to him during difficult days in Boston.

"I want to prove maybe a lot of these he said, she said things wrong," he said. "We're all people, man. We're all humans. And, yeah, we make mistakes, but how do we learn from it and how do we bounce back from it and how how much stronger do we get from that?"

His visits to the Bronx as an opponent did not go smoothly. In July 2021, Verdugo was struck on the back by a baseball thrown from Yankee Stadium's left-field stands.

"It's part of that rivalry," he said. "The mindset in New York, how people talk—they're a little bit more aggressive and they're kind of straight to the point. I like that, man. I enjoy it. And I think when they see me play every day and they see me bust my butt and work hard, I think they'll like what they see."



Pistons loses to Nets to set single-season record with 27th straight loss.

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Saipan Tribune Sports

Mets hit with record luxury tax of nearly \$101M for season of 4th-place finish.

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20 THURSDAY, DECEMBER 28, 2023

SAIPAN TRIBUNE

Barefoot runner keeps Christmas Relay tradition alive

By LEIGH GASES
leigh_gases@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Solo barefoot runner “Mike” Chang Whan Jang kept his Northern Marianas Athletics Annual Island Relay Race streak alive in the 42nd edition last Saturday.

Even with a new course and with the participants getting younger and younger each year, the spirited 72-year-old ran the course barefoot from the Hyatt Regency Saipan to Marpi and back.

Donning a Santa hat, Jang had an hour head start before the teams and ran through the course alone for over two hours.

He said when he first joined the race in the 1980s, he was the fastest amongst the teams in the 13.1-mile course.

To those who don’t know him, he’d make you wonder if he really is in his 70s as he is fit, active, and stays in the best shape he possibly could through a wide variety of sports.

The physical education teacher at Hopwood Middle School said he has missed just two of the 42 races and prefers the old course from San Antonio to the Last Command Post.

He said he’s had a lot of “good memories” with the old course that he’s ran since he was 30 years old, as he gets to



LEIGH GASES

Barefoot runner Chang Whan Jang runs to the finish line of the Northern Marianas Athletics’ 42nd Christmas Island Relay 13.1-mile course from Hyatt Regency Saipan to Marpi and back last Saturday.

‘Run from ‘23 Mile Race’ this Sunday

By LEIGH GASES
leigh_gases@saipantribune.com
REPORTER



Lace up your running shoes for the last race of 2023—“Run from ‘23 Mile Race” this Sunday, Dec. 31, at 6:45am.

The course starts next to the Saipan Shipping Co. and will go through the newly paved Industrial Road in front of the Gov. Eloy S. Inos Peace Park in Puerto Rico and ends right before the entrance to the Smiling Cove Marina.

Race divisions are the top open men and wom-

en, 14-and-under, 18-and-under, ages 35-39, 40-44, 45-49, 50-54, 55-59, and 60-and-up; along with a stroller/pram division.

There will be a new king and queen of the road as defending winners from the past two races—Keith Ketola and Tania Tan—won’t be here to compete.

Ketola set the course record last year with a time of 4:14, while Tan set her PB with a time of 5:06.

Run Saipan president Edward Dela Cruz Jr. said, “This is an all-out competition. You want to find out your fastest mile time and our course that we wanted to do for the last few years—the Industrial Road is done.”

“It’s a downhill, downhill race course, one way for who is the fastest one-mile runner, male, female, and student... I welcome everybody for our one-mile road race. So, if you want to find out your fastest mile time—this is the fastest one-mile race course. Everyone runs so fast. I can guarantee you there will be PBs set for everybody.”

Dela Cruz added that the new course will be the permanent one-mile road race course. “Thanks to the Commonwealth Ports Authority for getting the Industrial Road done,” he said.

To register, click <https://raceroster.com/events/2023/70415/run-from-23-mile-race>.



LEIGH GASES

Participants and Run Saipan officials take a jumping photo at the finish line of the Run from ‘22 Mile Race last year in Marpi.

snap photos of the Christmas lights and decorations that don the buildings and the Christmas villages that line Beach Road.

Jang said he chooses to run barefoot and has done so for many years now because of the benefits and the better

balance on the body than running wearing shoes.

He said of the annual event, “It’s a local tradition in the running community. They expect it—and see, there’s a lot of young kids. So, it is a tradition that’s why I couldn’t stop

joining every year.” For next year’s race, he plans to race again—barefoot of course.

Last year, he was joined by fellow solo barefoot runner, “Charles” Chong Nam Lee, but he wasn’t in this year’s race.

Dodgers shut down Reds, 21-1

By LEIGH GASES
leigh_gases@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The Dodgers tipped their record to the win column, 3-2, after they shut down the Reds, 21-1, last Thursday in the 2023 Tan Holdings-SBL Master’s League at the Francisco “Tan Ko” Palacios Baseball Field.

The rain was on and off and throughout the night that the game ended early in the fourth inning and handed the win to the Dodgers.

The Dodgers came soaring out of the batter’s box and didn’t let the evening drizzle dampen their game as they hit home 12 runs. They pummeled Reds starting pitcher Henry Reyes from the top of their lineup, to the end, as the Reds’ defense also floundered.

Leadoff batter Kalle Igisomar started the assault with a run after back-to-back Reds errors, allowing also James Benavente to score home after him. Derek Aguon hit a single and passed balls and a wild

pitch then brought him and Richard Quitugua home.

The barrage continued as the middle to the end of the lineup scored, while Igisomar and Aguon scored again before the final out could be made for a 12-0 game.

The Reds’ only run was in the first inning after Justin Reyes scored. In the next three innings, the Reds’

lineup was retired by Dodgers pitcher Jeff Cruz in order via groundouts and five strikeouts.

The Dodgers’ Aguon and Glen Camacho were the star of the game as Aguon went three for four hits, had one RBI, and hit one double, while Camacho also went three-for-four hits, scored one run, and collected three RBIs.

The season will resume in January, with the championship series slated for Feb. 19, Feb. 21, and Feb. 23.



LEIGH GASES

A Dodgers’ batter gets ready to take a swing against the Reds during their game in the 2023 Tan Holdings-SBL Masters League at Francisco “Tan Ko” Palacios Baseball Field.